

THE BEST OF THE GREATEST RUGBY MAGAZINE

RUGBY WORLD[®]

★ 2022 ★

STARRING

MARCUS SMITH
DUANE VERMEULEN
LOUIS REES-ZAMMIT
SHAUNAGH BROWN
RICHIE MO'UNGA

ANNUAL

STARRING

STUART MCINALLY
ANDREW PORTER
JAMES SLIPPER
PAUL WILLEMSE
AND MANY MORE!



Digital
Edition



ISSUE 02

20 WAYS TO SHAKE UP RUGBY

RUGBY WORLD[®]

2022

ANNUAL

Welcome to the **Rugby World Annual**, packed full of the best exclusives, features and analysis from the world's greatest rugby magazine over the past 12 months.

There are a host of interviews with the sport's biggest names, including England fly-half Marcus Smith, Ireland prop Andrew Porter, South Africa No 8 Duane Vermeulen, Wales wing Louis Rees-Zammit, France lock Paul Willemse, Red Roses star Shaunagh Brown, All Blacks back-row Dalton Papalii and Scotland back Huw Jones.

Plus, there is plenty of in-depth analysis and opinion. What makes Antoine Dupont (below) such a phenomenal player? How do you land on a team's playing style? Which difficult skill do the Red Roses make look easy? Who is the best overseas signing ever? Why is quick ruck ball so important? Where does rugby need to change? Are results more important than entertainment?

We hope you enjoy this collection of the best of *Rugby World* from the past year – and please remember that certain details in articles may have been overtaken by events as these were originally published from late 2021 onwards.



「 FUTURE 」

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2022

ANNUAL

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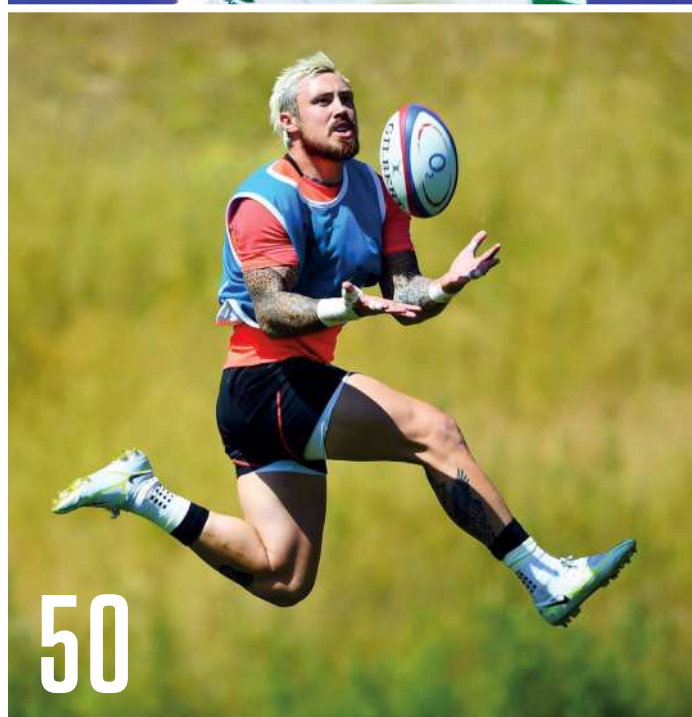
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A close-up portrait of a man with dark hair and a slight smile, wearing a red sports jersey with black and white stripes on the collar. The background is a vibrant pink with a geometric pattern of overlapping diamonds in shades of pink and light blue.

Words SARAH MOCKFORD // Main Pictures JAMES CHEADLE

THE TWO MARCUS

The fly-half marries an almost childlike joy for the game with a steely focus and constant desire to improve. *Rugby World* finds out how he does it

SIDES OF SMITH

A **S MARCUS SMITH** makes the short walk from *Rugby World's* makeshift outdoor photo studio to the warmth of the coffee shop at Harlequins' Surrey Sports Park base in Guildford, he is approached by a group of girls, not much younger than him, and asked for an autograph, a programme from the England-South Africa match thrust in his direction. He is happy to oblige and share in a brief exchange on the excitement of that game.

Smith has been well known in rugby circles for a few years now but the past six months have catapulted him →



Distribution centre
Linking play against Australia

➔ to a new stratosphere and the wider public consciousness. After all, he has won the Gallagher Premiership with Harlequins, made his England debut, been called up to the British & Irish Lions tour in South Africa and kicked the last-minute match-winning penalty against the world champions in front of a full house at Twickenham.

"To be honest it's a bit surreal to be recognised but I don't see it as a negative or a pressure," says Smith. "I see it as a privilege and an honour. If I was going to achieve what I wanted to achieve when I was growing up, then this was going to happen. I've got to embrace it now it's here and carry on being myself and carry on improving. Because hopefully I can keep improving and keep getting games for Harlequins and England."

His performances in the victories over Tonga, the Wallabies and the



Springboks in November, not to mention his club form, would suggest the games will keep coming. And the South Africa match is a particularly good example of how he has developed his game since first arriving on the senior scene as an 18-year-old in 2017. Smith is known for his attacking instincts, but against the

Boks he showed plenty of pragmatism, too, kicking for territory and clearing pressure. It's all about balance.

"That's the biggest part of the game which I've tried to learn," he explains. "Being at school and playing for England age groups, you don't really kick much. I remember my first-ever



HIS TATTOO

"For me it represents my mum. It's got the Philippines sun as well as my mum's favourite flower in the middle, which is a lily. The Philippines is a massive part of myself, I spent seven years there – a big chunk of my life – and I'm very, very proud of where I come from."



MANNY PACQUIAO

"He's one of my childhood heroes, just his work-rate, from where he's come from growing up to how he dominated the different weights in boxing. He's massively inspirational and also a giver back home. He's trying to improve the Philippines, which is admirable as well."



HIS GOOSESTEP

"It's about making the defender do something and then you reacting to it quickly. I think that's why I jump. I don't exactly know why I jump, but it gives me a bit of time for the defender to come at me and on the back of that I'll make my decision and choose my side."

MARCUS SMITH ON...



Hair-raising ability
Taking on the Stormers during the Lions tour

in camp from Eddie Jones and the England coaches.”

Smith has balance in his approach, too, combining the desire to improve and a steely focus on learning all he can with an almost childlike joy for playing the game – his celebrations leave you in little doubt as to how much he loves rugby. It is an intriguing combination, the pressure of professional rugby not quelling that natural passion, but it is one that is clearly working.

The 22-year-old rewinds to his childhood playing rugby in Asia. Born in Manila, the family moved from the Philippines to Singapore when he was seven and weekends were dominated by sport. They

close and a lot of those guys are now living in England, studying at unis in England, so I’ve been able to catch up with them on a face-to-face basis, which is great fun talking about the good old days running around in Singapore.

“When training finished we used to get our shoes off and socks off, eat a bacon sandwich with a cold drink, then get out there bare foot and play football and rugby. We’d be out there for hours.”

As for his willingness to attack – and the skill-set to set his ideas in motion – Smith puts that down

to the Hong Kong Sevens.

The family went to the premier event on the sevens calendar about six times while Smith was growing up and he’d be so inspired by the feats he saw on the pitch there that he’d soon be practising



“To be honest it’s surreal to be recognised but I don’t see it as a negative. I see it as a privilege”

game for Quins, I didn’t kick the ball once and I got subbed off after 65 minutes while last season I think I kicked the ball the second most in the league (he was behind only London Irish’s Paddy Jackson for kicks in play).

“For me it’s about understanding why you kick the ball. I’ve done a lot of work with Nick Evans here, Tabai (Matson) more recently, even Guzzy (Paul Gustard, former Quins head of rugby) I’ve learnt loads from with regards to my game management and kicking game, as well as the feedback I receive

would spend Saturdays and Sundays at the local rugby and football clubs, with training in the morning followed by big BBQs in the afternoon and the kids would then take to the pitch to play tag, touch, football...

“My rugby journey is probably a bit different to others. I grew up in Asia, the sun was always out and our lives revolved around sport and being together and enjoyment mainly. I still keep in contact with my age group back home in Singapore; we were extremely

them himself, looking to outfox his younger brothers Luc and Tomas with the type of sidestepping talent he’d seen from Fijian greats.

“For me, that’s the fun part of the game,” says Smith of attack. “At the Hong Kong Sevens, I used to watch the likes of William Ryder and Waisale Serevi and these sorts of players, who used to make the crowd get off their seats and bamboozle defenders. That inspired me to try to learn that. I’m still trying to get there but it’s exciting. I want to entertain and I want to get the crowd off their seats.”

To do that Smith is constantly looking for new ideas and more knowledge, discussing the game with coaches and players. Yes, he has the vision and instincts to produce moments others might not even see let alone do, but he puts in plenty of work too; he doesn’t rely on his natural talent, he adds layers to it. On top of the ‘extras’ that are now a prerequisite for any professional player, he looks to learn from others. In England camp, he’ll discuss moves and tactics with other players, just as he did on the Lions tour in South Africa.

It’s the same with coaches. He gets to work with Jonny Wilkinson in England camp. He’s still in touch with Nick Buoy, who coached him at Brighton College, and regularly messages former



Brothers in arms
With Tomas and Luc



Expert advice
Jonny Wilkinson working
with Smith and Max Malins

➔ Harlequins assistant coach Sean Long, who describes Smith as “a sponge” and “inquisitive”. Long adds: “He is so dedicated to rugby and would be out there for hours after training, working on his kicking and passing. He just wants to get better every day.”

For Smith, rugby is a subject to master and that means soaking up as much information as possible. There is a clear emphasis on development but that process is also something he takes

Roses bloom Celebrating with Henry Slade, who has helped guide Smith in England camp



“Everyone is different. If I can pick up one golden nugget from anyone I speak to, it’s a positive”

enjoyment from. “For me, I love my rugby, I’ve always loved it. I don’t see it as a chore at all, watching clips, watching highlight videos, watching games and studying opposition and studying players. For me, it’s actually a hobby; I bloody love it.

“I don’t see it as a job to be honest. I absolutely love coming to work, I absolutely love getting out there in the cold, in the sun, in the rain, throwing a ball about and trying to get stuck in with the boys. The way I think about rugby is I still feel it’s like playing for Brighton College on a Saturday at school. I’m extremely lucky and grateful for that opportunity, and the day I find it a chore is the day I’m regressing in my career so I hope that never comes.

“I’m still only five years into my career, I’ve still got a long way to go in every part of my game and I’m constantly reflecting on my performances. I’m just at

the start, I’ve enjoyed my last five years playing here at Quins and I’ve enjoyed the last six months playing with England.

“Every time I step on the field it’s been a massive honour. I want to put my best foot forward on the park, but as I say I’ve got a lot more to learn in every facet of my game. I’m excited about that and I’m excited about how far I can take it.”



Champions Lifting the Premiership trophy with Harlequins

He describes the England set-up as “a very open environment – everyone is sharing ideas, everyone is open to learning and everyone is willing to receive feedback”. It’s the same in terms of keeping in touch with Long or players he got to know on the Lions tour like Finn Russell. “I try to keep up with these guys because they’re all legends in the game. For me to learn one bit every time I speak to them, hopefully that will all add up in my career and allow me to be a better player every single day.

“I connect with Longy all the time. I send him clips, send him my thoughts and see if they marry up with his thoughts, like I do with Finn as well, just to hear his thoughts because everyone is different, everyone sees the game differently. And if I can pick up one golden nugget from him or Longy or anyone I speak to, it’s only a positive.”

Had his life taken a different route,

Smith may have been thriving in another sport. His first childhood dream – and that of his mum – was to be a footballer. He actually had trials with Tottenham and trained with Brighton’s junior set-up as a teenager. But when the rugby took off, playing for Brighton College and earning a spot in ➔

FACT FILE

DoB 14 Feb 1999

Born Manila, Philippines

Position Fly-half

Club Harlequins

Height 5ft 7in

Weight 12st 9lb

England debut v USA, 2021

Instagram handle @marcusmith10



“I’ve got a lot to learn in every facet of my game. I’m excited about how far I can take it”

➔ the Quins' academy set-up, his focus turned from the round to the oval ball.

"I fully committed to it and most evenings, especially in the summer months, I'd be out in the park opposite our house, which has posts, kicking a ball around, passing and sidestepping. I enjoyed every minute of doing that with my dad and brothers."

Family is hugely important to Smith. When he first moved out of home to join Quins full-time, he'd head back to Brighton often, craving his mum's cooking (and laundry). These days he can wash his own clothes and is a decent cook (his mum taught him how to make his favourite Filipino dish, sinigang – a sour soup), yet he still tries to visit every couple of weeks and they are regulars at his matches.

It's his parents, Suzanne and Jeremy, as well as his two brothers who he points to as being the biggest influence on his sporting career. "They're the reason why I'm playing rugby and I'm so grateful to have such a supportive mum and dad as well as brothers who sacrificed their weekends to ferry me

Hot stepper William Ryder in action for Fiji against Zimbabwe at the 2008 Hong Kong Sevens



around. I'm extremely lucky to have brothers who are so supportive. Without them and my mum and dad, I don't think I'd be here today."

Not that all the messages he receives from Luc and Tomas are of the positive variety; their support also involves making sure he stays grounded. "Tom gives the biggest amount of stick. He is the first to message me after games, is the first to laugh at me if I mess something up. They also think they can pick my sidestep, so they always say they know where I'm going when I sidestep. For me to have that brotherly

love and banter with them, I enjoy. I've got a brilliant support group around me off the field who are able to take my mind off the rugby stuff, which is massively important."

His brothers may mock him in the way only siblings can, highlighting the smallest of mistakes, but there was plenty of praise from other quarters for Smith's performances for England in November. Those Tests came more than four years after he was first called into the England squad by Jones, with the coach describing the then 18-year-old as an 'apprentice'. There was plenty of clamouring for the fly-half to be capped before he finally made his Test debut against the USA at Twickenham last July, yet the experience he had gathered in that ensuing period meant he felt more at ease in the England environment.

Last summer it helped that there were a lot of players he'd come through the age grades with in the England squad, there was a sense of familiarity, while in the autumn he was able to build on the "deeper connections" he'd made with those England players also involved with the Lions.

"In the most recent campaign in the autumn and the one in the summer, I was much more relaxed than I've ever been, which I'm happy about. I think in my early times, obviously I was very, very young, I was still extremely inexperienced. I'm not saying I'm experienced now, but I arrived in camp with many more games under my belt here at Quins, a lot

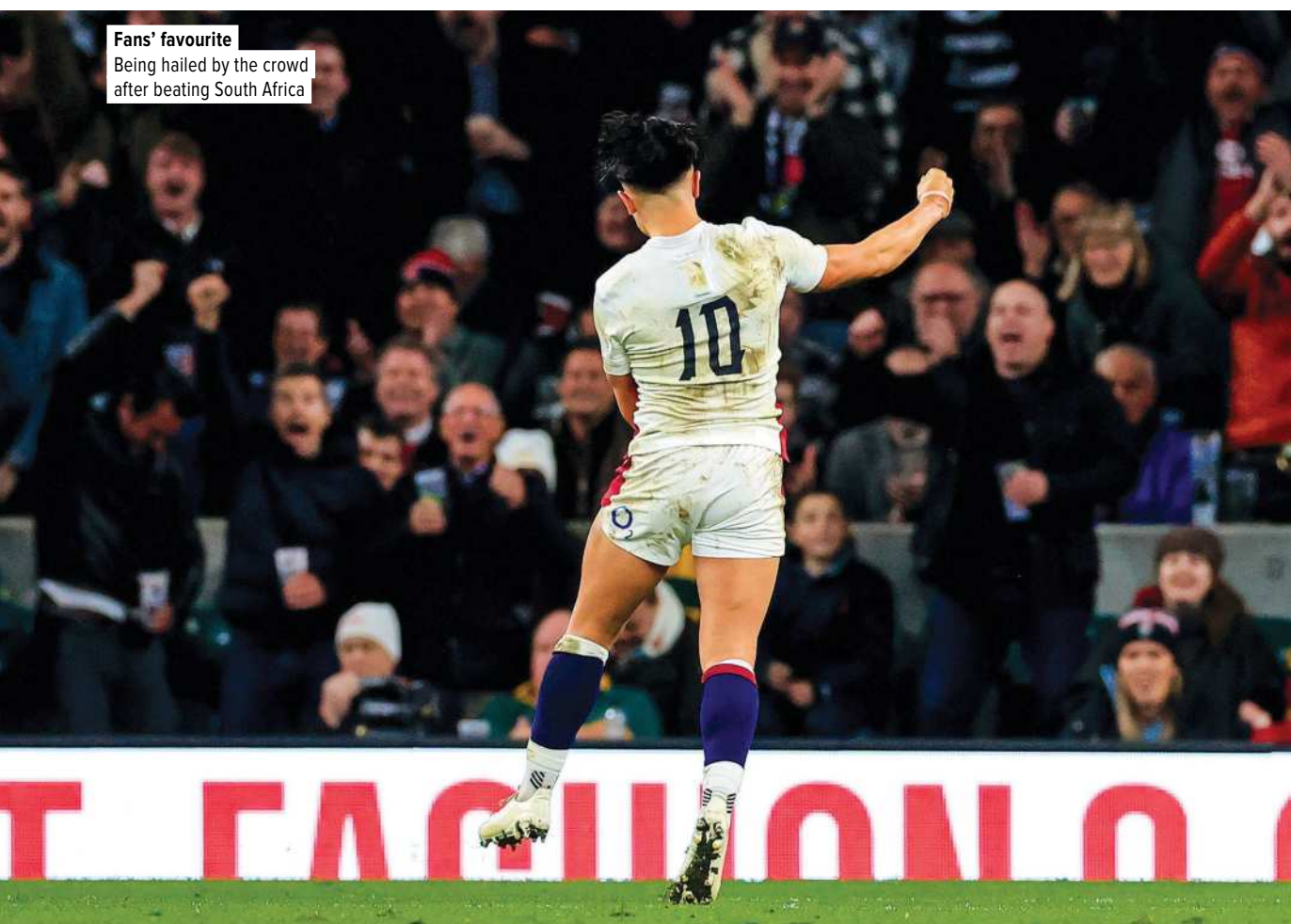
Show of emotion
Smith is known for his celebrations



On the front foot Getting away from Bath's defence during this season's Premiership campaign with Quins

Fans' favourite

Being hailed by the crowd after beating South Africa



more experience that I've learnt from. I've made mistakes in big games for Quins, so I'm able to go there and be in England camp with a much more mature mind and a much more focused mind on what I want to achieve for the team, mainly to do with attack.

"I've got older, I've been lucky to have some brilliant experiences that any young player would learn loads out of. I also think my relationship with the senior boys in England has grown over the last six to eight months, which is a massive help when you go into those environments. When you're a new guy, if those senior boys put an arm around you, support you and guide you, it makes it a whole lot easier. All the senior boys (have done that). In the summer, I spent a lot of time with Ellis Genge and Henry Slade, and

again they put their arm around me this autumn, as well as Owen Farrell and Courtney Lawes. These sort of guys that I idolised growing up are still brilliant England players, so to be supported at such a good level by them gives you the confidence to be yourself.

"I genuinely feel I've improved my game and improved myself as a person (during the autumn campaign). You're out of your comfort zone every time you step into an England camp; it's not always the same players there, you've got to get to know people and get to know how to get the best out of your team-mates, who reacts well to shouting, who reacts well to an arm around them. "I think to be able to get the best out of your team-mates and to share feedback effectively, then you need to know your

team-mates, you need to know your colleagues, because in the heat of battle you don't have time to think about what you say all the time, you have to understand how to get the best out of your team-mates pretty quickly.

"On those sort of fronts I feel I've had to learn and adapt, as well as speaking in an England environment, which when I was younger I was extremely nervous about but now I'm getting to grips with."

As is tradition, Smith had to mark his first cap with a song and *Life Is A Rollercoaster* seems like a fitting choice for all that has happened in his career to date. There are sure to be many twists and turns to come, but he certainly seems to be on an upward curve right now. He talks of wanting to "add value" at Quins as they push forward in the league and Europe, as well as his hopes of representing England again, with the Six Nations the next opportunity.

Still, for all the praise coming his way and the extra attention, it is something closer to home that gives Smith himself the most joy. "To see my family so happy and proud when I take the field, to see them in the crowd, inspires me to do it more. For me, that's how I find happiness." **EW**



"I'm able to be in England camp with a much more mature mind and a much more focused mind"



Words TOM ENGLISH // Main Picture CLIVE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

THE MOST stylish rugby players of all time. Where do we start? What do we mean by style anyway? That got us talking about the qualities we were looking for; not just on-field brilliance or physical brutality, but something extra. Genius that comes naturally. Easy class. An effortless cool. An audacious talent that takes something monstrously difficult and makes it look like the simplest thing in the world.

These folk are different but they're not the only ones with these gifts. You might agree with some on our list, you might be outraged at the omission of others. We'd love to know your thoughts.

So we begin. Style? These 12 couldn't have had more style had they walked onto the field in gear specially designed by Giorgio Armani or Coco Chanel.



STYLE ICONS

*Classy, effortless, a little je ne sais quoi...
Here are a dozen players who have dazzled
us with their stylish feats on the pitch*

Juan Martín Hernández

When they weren't calling him rugby's Maradona back home in Argentina, they called him *El Mago* – The Magician. Once the best full-back in the world, Hernández moved to ten for the 2007 World Cup and was mesmeric, inspiring the Pumas in a victory over host nation France and taking them all the way to the semi-final. They beat France again in the bronze final and he was shortlisted for World Player of the Year on the back of what he did at the tournament.

He was a unique talent. Fearless and exuberant. He'd attack with audacity from deep inside his own half without a negative thought in his head. He expressed himself like a Hollywood actor and had the good looks to match.

Hernández had a terrific boot and a magical sleight of hand. He was pure style and pure class. Simple as that. →



Sonny Bill Williams

On the field, Sonny Bill rarely got himself into a spot so tight that he couldn't offload his way out of it. With 58 caps, he was one of the game's great entertainers, his adventurous high-class style illuminating many occasions, be it for the Crusaders, Chiefs or All Blacks.

He scored 13 Test tries, which is not a huge total, but he was heavily involved in many, many more. We know SBW as a very individual talent but at the height of his powers he was a tremendous team player. Time and again he drew in the cover and flicked an improbable pass out the side door to a team-mate in space. He was the epitome of slickness. A smart operator with a touch of the divine about him.



Serge Blanco

It was once suggested that if there was a poll of French rugby fans to discover the nation's most exciting player, the top three would have read: Serge Blanco, Serge Blanco, Serge Blanco. The full-back was a flowing mix of pace, vision and daring, a fluent runner and an impossibly cool guy to boot.

Blanco scored 38 tries in 93 Tests, and whether it was a trademark chip-and-gather or exquisite timing into the line to score, he did it with such grace. His reading of the game and his ability to know exactly where he needed to be to strike was unerring.

Blanco was serene and yet explosive. Quality from top to toe.



Schalk Brits

In his epic nine years with Saracens, Brits proved himself to be probably the greatest of all of foreign imports in Premiership rugby. The number '2' on his back never once defined him. He was by turns a hooker, a centre, a wing and an openside flanker all rolled into one thrilling package.

He had the skill-set to do each of those jobs, winning four league titles and two Champions Cups. His sidesteps became famous, his downfield surges were a joy.

He didn't just entertain on the pitch, he entertained off it. He wore his heart on his sleeve and had a smile on his face. A much-loved Springbok. Fun, humble, gallant, unforgettable.



← **Emily Scarratt**

Not just a champion in her sport but a champion of her sport; a smart and inspirational figure with a breathtaking career and a flowing excellence. Where do we start? A sevens player who has competed at the Commonwealth Games, World Cup and Olympics. A centre and full-back in Test rugby who has won a World Cup, multiple Six Nations titles, a World Player of the Year award, a place at the top of the scoring charts for her country and a half-century of international tries. Gobsmacking.

Scarratt can turn bad ball into good, can make an attack that appears to have ground to a halt into a try with her ability – and she makes it look easy, that's the remarkable thing. She's been making it look easy for a very, very long time.

→ **Jeremy Guscott**

The great England centre didn't run, he glided. Everything about him looked effortless. The dummies that bewitched defences, the rapid acceleration that took him through gaps big or small, the brilliance of his finishing – he was one of the most beautifully balanced runners and most elegant players we have seen.

His career is dripping with honours and it's still easy to recall some of the moments that defined him – the grubber and pick-up that settled that second Lions Test in Australia in 1989 and the delicious drop-goal that won the series in South Africa eight years later.

There was more, though. Much more. In the Grand Slam of 1995 he scored a sumptuous try against France, dummying Philippe Sella and Thierry Lacroix. Even on his last day in an England jersey he exuded class. Another dummy inside his own 22 in a World Cup game against Tonga in 1999 and he was away. Well into his thirties, he still ate up ground like a thoroughbred. Majestic. →



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Who do you think is the most stylish player of all time? Do they feature in our list of 12? Or do you think someone else deserves the title? Let us know by emailing rugbyworldletters@futurenet.com or get in touch via our social media channels.



↑ Leone Nakarawa

In his pomp with Glasgow, Racing and Fiji, the big man was as smooth as silk, as tranquil on the ball as it's possible to be when you have two, three or four beasts hanging off you. His offloading skills have gone down in legend. Those telescopic arms, that long stride, that spontaneity make him such a classy operator.

His hands are like shovels and yet they are so, so soft. At times you wonder how on earth he gets a ball away to a support runner. You have to rewind and watch again to pick up the subtlety. A carefree artist.



↑ Heather Moyse

Moyse was one of those athletes who only had to participate in a sport for five minutes before becoming ridiculously good at it. A wonder.

The Canadian was one of the best full-backs the women's game has seen. Her gliding running style helped her finish leading try-scorer in her first World Cup in 2006 and joint-leading try-scorer in her second. Her excellence got her into the World Rugby Hall of Fame in 2016.

But that's just part of it. She won two Olympic golds in bobsleigh and raced for Canada in the Pan-American Cycling Championships. She had an innate quality. Rare and remarkable.

← Brian O'Driscoll



Even in his early days in a green jersey you could see that the gathering hype was well-merited. The *élan* he showed could have been French or could have belonged to one of the players he admired as a kid, Carlos Spencer.

Ireland had not seen this kind of creative midfield quality in several generations. He was fast, dynamic, lethal; he was the most un-Irish back anybody had seen in years. He moved up the levels with ease, scoring a hat-trick in a famous Ireland win in Paris in 2000 before becoming a Lion the year after and scoring one of the great Lions tries against Australia.

He was a rousing presence. Sublime. Effervescent. A one-off. Every rugby-loving kid in Ireland wanted to be like him. He sparked something, a new wave.

→ Waisale Serevi



There was something otherworldly about Serevi. The way he motored into a ruck of players but somehow found a shaft of space between them that nobody else could see, the way he changed direction like a character in a computer game, the dancing feet, the lightning acceleration, the slaloming brilliance of his runs and how routine he made it all look.

The Fijian played with joy. He was a showman, the greatest exponent of the sevens game there has ever been. Serevi won two Sevens World Cups but more than that, he won a place in the annals of the sport, not just because of what he achieved but in the glorious way he achieved it.

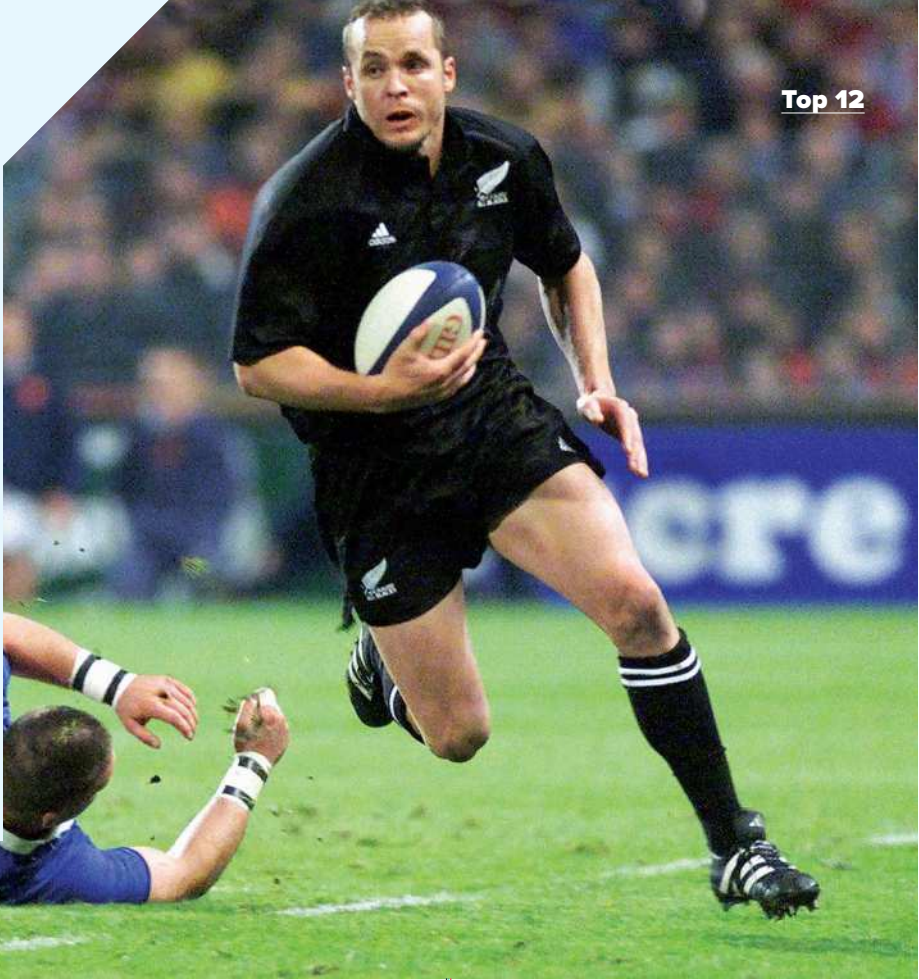


Christian Cullen

When you look back at clips of Cullen's best moments, it's rugby's equivalent of a religious experience, a rugby god returning to entertain us. The Paekakariki Express was dazzling and that's putting it mildly. His speed, his sidesteps, his adventure, his magic was, and remains, hypnotic.

The All Black went past defenders like they weren't there, he ghosted around the place in a blur. He scored four tries against Scotland in his second cap. For one, he raced past one Scot, sidestepped three more and went through three more after that. Sublime doesn't come close.


He scored 46 tries in 58 Tests and made it look like a stroll in the park, albeit one where his stroll was about 100mph. It's doubtful that we'll ever see anything like him again.



Barry John

The King, a natural, a fly-half who was born to play. He lit it up for Wales but it was really the 1971 Lions tour of New Zealand that cemented his greatness.

Against the NZ Universities XV, he scored a try that will never be forgotten by those who watched it. Stepping inside and out, John left Greg McGee, the Universities No 8, feeling like he'd seen something that "shouldn't have been possible".

Carwyn James, the great Welsh coach who led the tour, called it "poetry, sheer poetry. It was flair, imagination, it was genius." John made it look simple. That was his gift. 



PICS Getty Images & Impho

France



“HE JUST DOESN’T HAVE ANY WEAKNESSES”

Toulouse and France scrum-half **Antoine Dupont** tops our list of the 100 best players in the world in 2021 – here’s why

THE LAST time we compiled this list, in mid-2019, the highest-ranked France player was Pauline Bourdon, of the women’s team. You had to get to the 40s before you found any Frenchmen.

The fact that Antoine Dupont has rocketed from 47th to top spot illustrates just how much France have improved over the past couple of years – and how central the scrum-half has been to that improvement. And that’s before you look at his feats with Toulouse.

He helped his club complete the double in 2021, lifting the European Champions Cup and Top 14. He beat more defenders (24) and made more metres (356) than any other player as the French giants were crowned European champions for a record fifth time. In the Six Nations, he topped the stats for try assists (five) and offloads (eight), and he closed out the year as France captain, leading his country to a first win over the All Blacks since 2009.

Dupont has racked up personal accolades aplenty in 2021, too. Along with his European Player of the Year, Top 14 Player of the Year and France International Player of the Year awards, he was honoured with the top gong at the famous *Midi-Olympique* ‘Oscars’ for the third consecutive year. His anointment as World Rugby’s Men’s 15s Player of the Year completed the set.

Over the page, international No 9s past and present explain what makes Dupont such a phenomenal player, while Stuart Barnes breaks down his skill-set... ➔



Middle man
At the centre
of France training

→ RORY LAWSON

31 caps for Scotland

He just doesn't have any weaknesses. There's no flaw in any part of his game.

If you consider the best scrum-halves in the world in the past decade or two, you typically have your George Gregans, Aaron Smiths, Will Genias; those types of guys who manage a game well and have a really good skill-set. And then you have your other type of scrum-half, your Joost van der Westhuizens, your Mike Phillippes, the bigger scrum-halves, more physical, built like back-rows.

Dupont is 5ft 8in, give or take, but he has a physical presence, he has proper man-strength whereby he can swat away weak defenders around the fringes of a ruck. So he can do that part of it, the confrontation, and he can also do the other part, the creative.

He's absolutely electric off the mark and his basic skills are world class. His pass is zippy, he's quick in and out of the ruck, he has the ability to threaten

“The biggest thing that stands out is his hustle. He's got relentless energy, he never seems to drop”

the fringes himself but understands how to put others into space and, like every great scrum-half, his pace post-pass to either get to the next ruck or run that support line is fantastic.

Defensively he's very good. As a kicker, he not only has a really accurate kick but he has a really long kick when he needs it. And we're starting to see his leadership come through now as well.

So, no weaknesses and his strengths are so incredibly strong that you can't pick any holes in what he does.

An incredible rugby player.

NATASHA HUNT

55 caps for England

The biggest thing that stands out for me is his hustle. He's got relentless energy

around the park and galvanises any team he's in; he does it for club and for country. He never seems to dwindle, never seems to drop.

His skill-set is one of the best out there. He's so confident with his pass, which every good nine is, he brings flair, he has a kicking game, he is on top of where the space is.

Then there's what he gives you in defence; he's so powerful he's like an extra back-row. At nine, it's about getting on top of people and that's the way he thinks as well. He's so powerful and he rarely gets it wrong; if he goes to make a shot and flies out of the line, he always gets man and ball. So effective.

There's his game awareness as well, his decision-making. He looks for those opportunities to run a line and then goes; he always makes good decisions. Also, because he's so consistent there, people look for him in support. Other nines might go every now and then, but he is always on that line, so people look as they know he's going to be there.

Any nine is naturally a leader because of the role they play in the team and, for me, his energy and the way he goes about his business, he really drags people up to that level. He's definitely a lead-by-example kind of guy.

AARON SMITH

102 caps for New Zealand

It's no secret that I really rate Dupont. I watch his play closely and he has a real impact. Everything good that happens around that French team seems to be around what he is doing. His ability to really pounce on an opportunity is impressive. He gets an offload off a line break and he just finishes. It's crazy. His kicking game has real nous and, with his man-to-man ability, he is a freak. He can run down the blind and step or fend



Men of power
With French president
Emmanuel Macron

defenders. I call him a sniper, he sees an opportunity and just doesn't miss.

You don't play international rugby at nine if you don't have a good pass. Both Faf de Klerk and Dupont have that and are dynamic, passionate players. They punch above their weight as they are very physical in contact, certainly more than me! They can bust a tackle and put a hit on. They pick and choose when to run, it's not just all-out speed.

I first faced Antoine in a 2017 Test in France. He played very well, nipped and zipped around the ruck. We won that day but I remember thinking, 'He has some juice and a bit of go about him'.

WILL GENIA

110 caps for Australia

The thing that stands out most for me is his athleticism. He's got an electric turn of pace and is very strong in the carry with a great sense of anticipation. You couple that with how ultra-competitive he is and it's a scary prospect for opposition teams.

GREIG LAIDLAW

76 caps for Scotland


Antoine obviously has top-end speed, which makes him dangerous to forwards in and around the breakdown, but I think one of the things that sets him apart is his low centre of gravity. That makes him really strong so therefore tough to tackle.

When you see him break tackles, it's normally on the bigger men. Couple that with a strong fend – that's why he breaks a lot of tackles, and once he is into space that's where his speed and his rugby abilities clearly take over.

MICHAEL BRADLEY

40 caps for Ireland

He has all the physical attributes needed to be world class – strength, speed, stamina and technical skill level – but, for me, his ability to remain 'cool' and to 'read/feel' the key moments in a game and to then make the right decision make him stand out as the world-class operator that he is today.

The style that Toulouse and France play allows Antoine to express his natural talent week in, week out. Maintaining your composure at the highest level in the key moments of a game is rare. He chooses from a large menu of options; most other nines are following team instructions. 



HEAD TO T

Former England fly-half Stuart Barnes analyses Antoine Dupont's skill-set...

VISION

You can possess all the physical attributes but if you cannot see the potential space in front of you (or sideways), greatness will never beckon. If you possess the pace and power of Dupont – and his capacity to see the slightest of growing gaps around the fringes or on the short side – you might just be the best player in the world.

HEART

Rugby isn't always a front-foot affair. Nor is it for the faint of heart. In defence, it takes strength and technique but also that beating heart to keep going when it hurts. Look back to the last French win in Cardiff and watch the number and intensity of tackles he makes. Dupont defends like a fourth back-rower. He's the ninth forward with the vision of the pre-eminent back.

BALANCE

Call it low centre of gravity; Dupont's enables him to excel in another two areas of the game. Approaching the breakdown, he's able to adjust his body into the perfect compact position from which to shift the pass away from the melee whatever the quality of the presentation.

If he decides not to pass but dart, he is able to swerve away from and beneath tackles of the usual giants. This balance is the priceless asset that combines with his vision to put his teams in open space.

THIGHS

He generates amazing acceleration courtesy of those pumping legs. While his calf strength is important, it's power from the thighs that enables him to combine a sprinter's speed with a world-class rugby player's ability to roll with the attempted tackle and come through it at a fair old lick. He's the ideal size for a scrum-half and blessed with the body to make him high-on impossible to knock over.

FEET

Whether it is dancing his way through a congested space or changing direction at the last minute to pick those unique and unstoppable support lines of his, Dupont's fast feet are the flashy part of this rugby sports car. When his footwork leaves others trailing in the dirt or standing flat-footed, that's when you are blown away by the metaphorical roar of this sturdy superstar.

DOWNTIME WITH... DUANE VERMEULEN

“My grandmother phoned me after the ref mic picked me up cursing”

From his cooking to tidiness, get to know the Ulster and South Africa No 8

Interview Sarah Mockford // Pictures Getty Images & Inpho

HOW HAVE you settled into Belfast? I've been getting used to the wet and cold! The first part was great as I had my family here for a couple of months but they went back to South Africa. It's difficult being on your own but I'm enjoying the club and the culture. Hopefully I'll get to learn more and see more of this beautiful country.

Apart from your family, what do you miss most about South Africa? A proper braai – I can't say barbecue!

Are you a good cook? That's my hidden talent! I love to cook, it's just not great when you're cooking for one person. When I was younger I started to make my own dishes, like lemon-and-lime rice and peanut butter spinach. It may sound a bit strange but it's really tasty.

What's the funniest thing you've seen on the pitch? Most of the stuff is R-rated

so the only thing I can say is I've seen a couple of streakers and the way security manhandles them is pretty funny.

Who are the jokers in the Ulster and South Africa squads? At Ulster it's mostly James Hume and Ian Madigan. With the Boks, there are a couple of interesting characters. Damian de Allende stands out, Frans Steyn can crack a joke... Trevor Nyakane and Bongi Mbonambi – if you

see those two it's a good laugh just to look at them!

Any nicknames? I've had a couple through the years. When I started at Western Province I was called 'Manchild' because I looked like a man but acted like a child because I was still very young. Then 'Customs'. A guy called Anton van Zyl

came to Western Province, introduced himself and said, "Call me Worms".

I said, "I'm Duane" and he asked how I spelt it. It's similar to customs – doeane – in Afrikaans and that stuck.

Do you have any phobias? I'm not really scared of anything unless I'm in their environment. So in the ocean I'd be a bit uncomfortable about sharks, in a river or a lake it would be crocodiles.

What really annoys you?

Things being out of place. I'm a bit of a perfectionist. I grew up in a perfectionist home, so I'm a little OCD. It can be difficult, going about your days and you see guys with something out of the norm. I try to pick tidy room-mates. I've had a couple of guys where it's chaos on their side of the

FACT FILE

DoB 3 July 1986
Born Nelspruit, SA
Position No 8
Province Ulster
Height 6ft 4in
Weight 18st 10lb
Instagram handle @customs08

WHAT'S ON YOUR PHONE?



Last person you phoned
 The Boks doctor



Most important person in phone
 Definitely my wife, Ezél



Last person you texted
 My wife, at 11am this morning



Last photo you took
 I made a video for myFanPark for a guy's birthday



Favourite social network
 My Twitter got hacked so now I just have Instagram



“I don’t like things being out of place. I’m a perfectionist”

Provincial spell
Vermeulen’s Ulster deal runs until 2023



Sporting great
Tiger Woods

room whereas mine is perfectly neat and I know where stuff is. RG Snyman is a menace in a room!

What superpower would you like to have? To change time or teleport. Not to necessarily change a specific moment in time but maybe to go back in time. You can control most things, but not time.

Embarrassing moment? Once I cursed in front of the referee and it was picked up on the ref mic. My grandmother

phoned me the day after and asked what I’d said. Then I had one or two Instagram messages telling me my language was inappropriate.

Who’d you like to be stuck in a lift with? This is a difficult one but I’d say my dad. He passed away when I was eight years old and being that young you can’t remember a lot of stuff, you don’t really know your parents when you’re growing up or understand what life is about. So if I could sit down with him and have a chat, ask him questions, talk about things that have moulded me through life... It would be a really interesting conversation.

What’s the silliest thing you’ve ever bought? In South Africa, well probably all over the world, on TV there are those

infomercials and I end up spending a lot of money on things that look like they really work on TV but don’t work the same at home.

If you could be one team-mate, who would it be? Myself. I’m a really good team-mate!

Who would be your three dream dinner party guests? Tom Brady, Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan – they’re all


guys who have been and still are very successful in their sporting careers. It would be amazing to understand what makes them tick, what got them to where they are in life, what got them to change their game to stay at the top.

What’s your guilty pleasure? Jelly sweets, gummies. I’m not a big chocolate person but any jelly sweets.

What would you like to achieve outside of rugby? I’ve been chasing this ball for 18 seasons and now I’m in the last part of my career. I have two boys and my oldest son is turning nine this year. I’ve been away from them for seven or eight years, so the biggest thing for me is to spend time with my family. And proper time, a year where non-stop I can get out of bed and do things with the kids. Those are special times.

That’s why I talked about time before; there are things that are gone that you’ll never get back in life and kids only stay kids until a certain age.

How’d you like to be remembered?

As a guy who made a difference in someone’s life, either on the pitch or off the pitch. If I can make a difference in one guy’s life, I’ve played my part. 



Last song you played
Angels Above Me by Stick Figure



Favourite WhatsApp group
A group with about eight couples that we call ‘retirement village’



Last app downloaded
CoachNow. My boys’ golf coach uploads videos of them to it

Are results more important than entertainment?

BRENDEN NEL



Freelance South African rugby journalist

STUART BARNES



Former England fly-half, analyst and journalist

YES, YES and 1,000 times again, yes.

It's easy to fall into the camp of wanting to be entertained, but sport is a simple business. What counts is winning. Sure there are moments to be savoured, those you remember for a long time, but the only thing that matters is whether or not you come home with the trophy.

New Zealand were in depression after drawing the 2017 British & Irish Lions series and while this year's Lions series has seen inches of copy given to former players and coaches criticising the style of play, you won't find many complaints in South Africa. Because being on the right side of the scoreboard is what counts.

Allister Coetzee's Boks tried to entertain. And they lost to England, Italy and shipped 57 points against New Zealand. What Rassie Erasmus and Jacques Nienaber have done is make the Boks a ruthless machine, intent on getting the result. So while others will harp on about boring rugby, the Boks keep on winning. And they keep their fans happy.

And boring rugby? It's all in the eye of the beholder. In the Lions series all the Springboks' tries were scored by backs – the two Lions' tries came from rolling mauls.

Yes, everyone wants to see end-to-end tries and players beating a man one-on-one. But for that we have sevens. The Springboks have a Rugby Championship, a World Cup and a Lions series in their trophy cabinet. Do you really think they care about being labelled as boring?

NAME THE most successful team in the history of the pro game. It's clearly New Zealand. The World Cup is a relative blip with 'just' three titles but their win:loss ratio is one of the more staggering displays of global dominance in sport.

Name the most entertaining Test team in the world. Yes, New Zealand again. Winning might be 'everything' for the All Blacks but the manner in which they play is even more than 'everything'. The All Blacks are the best *because* they focus on being entertaining; they are fast-skilled and bloody hard to stop.

Can you imagine how long the game will remain the high-profile televised sport it is if it continues to deliver the dross of the recent Lions series? The 21st century is full of viewing options.

Yes, that series was about winning at all costs. In the dawn of time, when I played for Bath we didn't care what anyone thought, as long as we won... And fans didn't seem to care about the manner in which we won. As long as we did. But that was then, the game was

amateur. Now it is professional and happy tribes who wallow in collapsed scrums are not going to sustain a sport struggling to produce the package.

Neutrals cannot continue to love most of the crap on display. Viewing figures will collapse. 'Winning is all' belongs in the past. Try watching New Zealand without caring who wins. It's entertaining. It's also the only positive future for professional rugby union.



Bok to front
Makazole Mapimpi scores against the Lions

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send your views to
rugbyworldletters
@futurenet.com

HOW TO TAKE A HIGH BALL

Top tips from Leicester and England full-back **Freddie Steward** on winning the aerial battle

"I try to read the body language of the kicker to see how long the kick will be. I don't want to move too early, though, because if I drop deep they can kick short. I want to be deeper than where I think the ball will land so I can run onto it. When the ball is in the air I just focus on the flight of the ball and ignore anyone who is coming towards me."

"In practice we make it as game-realistic as possible. We'll use tackle bags and swimming pool floats to hit the player as they go up, to replicate what it's like to compete for the ball. We will also put a tackle shield on the back of one of the lads and practise jumping onto that. Before games I do loads of reps catching the high ball. Each stadium is different and you need to get used to the wind and so on."

"If the catch is contested, my only focus once I hit the ground is to get as many metres forward as possible. I don't think about passing in that situation. If it's a longer kick, I rely on the players around me to tell me what to do. If they want me to run with the ball they will shout 'carry' and if they want me to move the ball they will shout 'shift'. With my team-mates giving me those instructions, I can focus on just catching the ball."

"As the ball comes down you want to get as high as you can to win the space, then get your knee up to increase the space you'll have in the air. We were doing work in the England camp with a psychiatrist. If I drop a high ball, I take a few deep breaths, drop back to the position I need to be and think about my next task."

HOW TO POWER OVER FROM A DRIVING MAUL

The England women's team make this difficult skill look easy, says **Sean Holley**



THE ENGLAND women's team is a fully pro, finely-tuned winning machine. The players look hungry, superbly conditioned and at one with a coaching unit headed by Simon Middleton.

The mark of last autumn's wins over New Zealand was the 56-15 rout in the second Test at Franklin's Gardens. The Black Ferns beat England in the 2017 World Cup final, scoring 41 points, but this is a different England. There is a balance to their play that sees backs and forwards playing with tempo and adept at passing, offloading and getting into position with speed and precision.

There is solid leadership throughout the squad with experience in the form of Sarah Hunter, a 'lead from the front' attitude from Poppy Cleall, and direction at fly-half from Zoe Harrison.

The most impressive aspect of that series-clinching win over New Zealand was the set-piece. In particular, England's meticulous lineout and the constant threat from the driving maul. Forwards coach Louis Deacon is no stranger to the nuances of this part of the game, having come through Leicester's ranks. He's acutely aware of how the driving maul can not just impact the scoreboard but also its role in destroying opposition resistance, deterring them from even kicking to touch to give England lineouts.

Hooker Amy Cokayne scored three tries from driving mauls in the match at Northampton – a sure sign that England's players and coaches have a clear understanding of what's required. This month I've taken a closer look at her second try against New Zealand, which came just before half-time and broke the visitors' resolve...



WHO IS SEAN HOLLEY?

A former Ospreys and Bristol coach who has also worked with Wales and is now a TV analyst



The Set-up. Props Vickii Cornborough and Sarah Bern stand at either end of the lineout. As potential primary lifters, this encourages New Zealand to mark up on them. The actual lifting pod of Alex Matthews (front) and Poppy Cleall (back), and jumper Abbie Ward, arrive slightly later and execute the lift/jump before NZ have time to react. Flanker Marlie Packer acts as scrum-half so she can be the first player onto the ball once Ward lands.

Coaching Points Practise the lift and jump skills with and without competition. Hookers should practise throwing to different zones in the lineout; a coach, armed with a pole and catching net, can move to different positions in the ten-metre lineout span. The jumper, with elbows and hands high, can use her arms to help propel herself upwards and straight while the lifters clasp their binds to begin to lift.

Any motion forwards or backwards can affect the lift, so the jumper should focus on jumping straight to maximise the lift. She should have minimal dip at the knees, making it hard for opponents to read the play and to react. Matthews and Cleall complete their lifts by manoeuvring Ward into the correct position and then cleverly shift beyond her towards the defenders to offer a buffer to the oncoming assault.

5

Try Time! The precise formation and momentum of the English drive proves too much for New Zealand. Cokayne waits until the maul crosses the line and drops to the floor to score.

Coaching Points Decision-making again is important in the final act of getting to the line. The hooker mustn't get impatient and break away too early, especially if it's a well-constructed maul. Likewise, the players in front of the ball. They must stay tight until the end to ensure the job is done.

The practice of the maul in live situations, after players have learnt their roles and formation, is the only real way to learn of the pitfalls, legalities and physical effort required of this demanding skill. Encourage feedback from each repetition and make the defensive team in practice value their roles in spending time on this aspect of the game. It will definitely pay off.

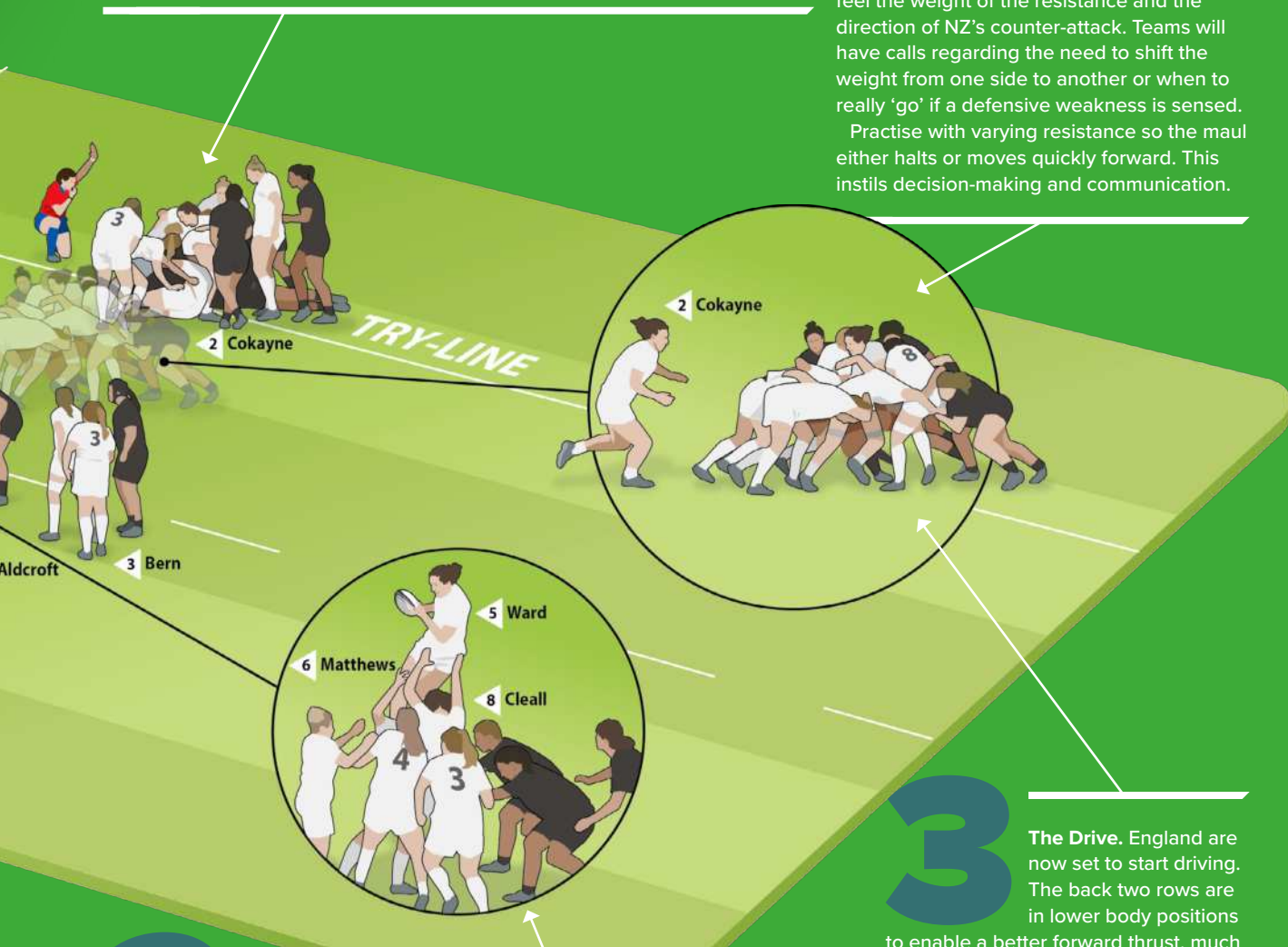
4

Keep the Shape. Those at the front work to keep the maul square. The second line keep their body angles and

legs driving. Cokayne maintains a low body position and drives her legs, ball in one hand, bound to the maul with the other. The force is too much for NZ, who defend individually to try to stop the maul propelling to their line.

Coaching Points Communication is key. As the jumper, Ward is the most upright player and can see the shape of the maul. She can feel the weight of the resistance and the direction of NZ's counter-attack. Teams will have calls regarding the need to shift the weight from one side to another or when to really 'go' if a defensive weakness is sensed.

Practise with varying resistance so the maul either halts or moves quickly forward. This instils decision-making and communication.



2

The Delivery. After catching the ball, Ward turns towards her team-mates while still in the air and lands safely. Cornborough moves to Ward's inside hip whilst lock Zoe Aldcroft, who was at the back of the lineout with Bern to act as a potential jumping option, moves swiftly to Ward's outside hip. Cornborough and Aldcroft now act as the second row of the formation, behind the front row of lifters Matthews and Cleall. Packer joins to take the ball from Ward. Bern binds onto Aldcroft for extra drive and Cokayne arrives to receive the ball from Packer.

Coaching Points Both lifters must take care not to lose their bind for stability and not to get too far forward and thus risk being penalised for illegal blocking. They need to be tight so that New Zealand can't get an arm through onto the ball or knock it to the floor. The ball transfer is crucial – Packer and then Cokayne must be bound to the maul before receiving the ball to adhere to the laws.

In training, try disrupting this process by getting a 'nuisance' defender to move the lifters and another to get through any gaps to knock the arms of the lifters or get to the ball. This will test the solidity of the formation.

3

The Drive. England are now set to start driving. The back two rows are in lower body positions to enable a better forward thrust, much like in a scrum. The lifting pod stays compact and essentially forms an arrowhead that the rest of the players can push through to split the defence.

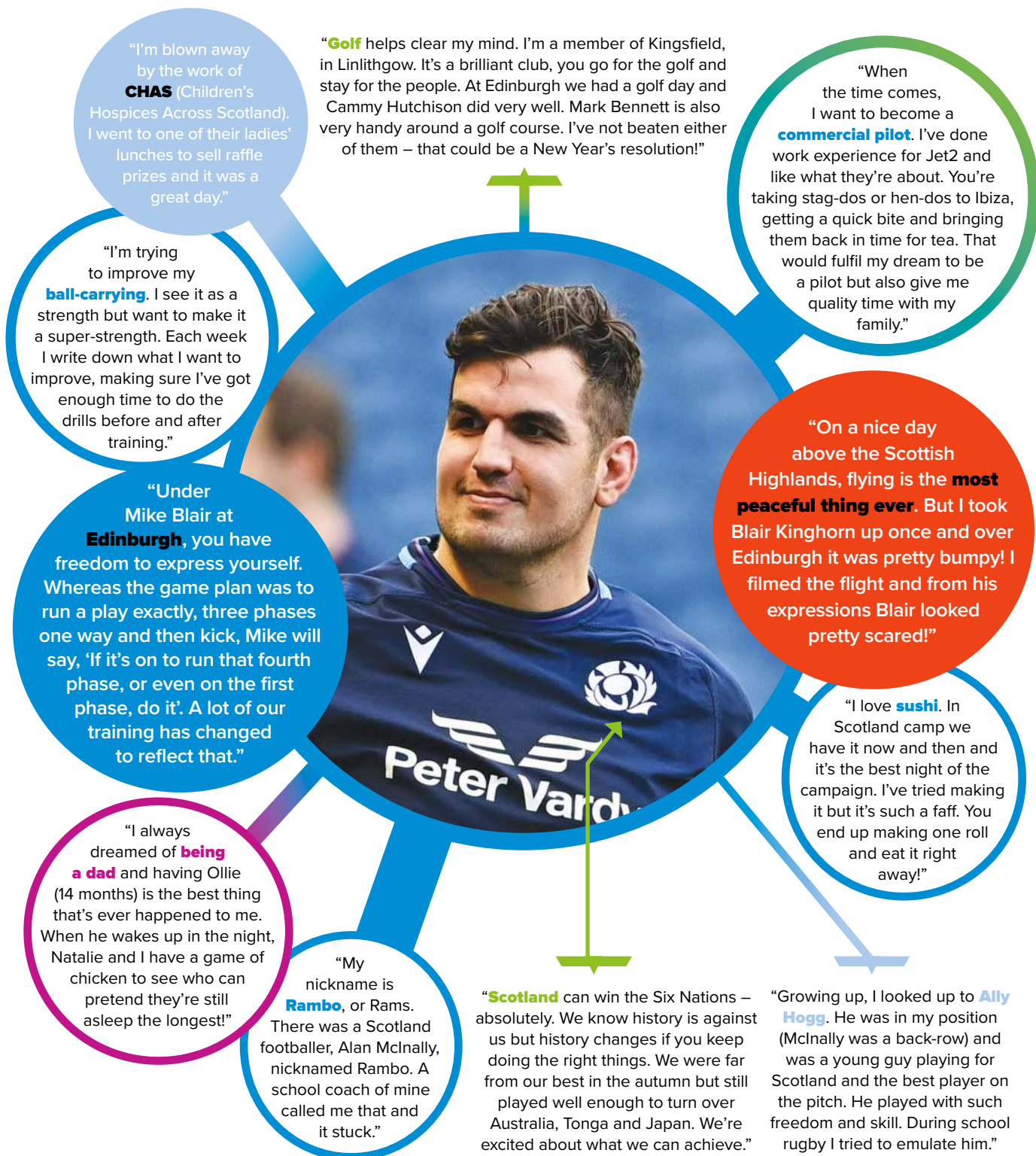
They also prevent an opponent from 'swimming' through the maul to get at the ball or ball-carrier. Cokayne has the ball well away from any threat and England can concentrate on staying tight and driving towards the line.

Coaching Points Build this process with a 'whole-part-whole' method, especially if coaching younger players. Walking through the steps and breaking it down step by step, even without having the ball thrown in, is essential for learning and proprioception.

INSIDE THE MIND OF... STUART McINALLY

Interview **Alan Pearey** // Picture **Getty Images**

From fatherhood to flying, get to know the Edinburgh and Scotland hooker



WHAT GOES ON TOUR...

[Goes in Rugby World]

HAD A call before the 2002 Heineken Cup semi-final against Leicester saying the organisers wanted myself, Gareth (Jenkins) and Scott Quinnell to attend a press conference in Nottingham, writes *Anthony Buchanan, the former Llanelli Scarlets team manager.*

"Are you serious?" I asked. "It'll take us four hours to drive up and another four hours coming home."

"You will receive a heavy fine if you don't attend," was the reply.

"The only way you're getting us there is if you send a helicopter."

He called back ten minutes later:

"Right, we've got a helicopter."

On the Thursday we climbed into the helicopter at Stradey and touched down on the halfway line of Nottingham Forest's ground. We climbed out, made our way to the press conference and came back out, all within 90 minutes.

On the way back, the Brecon Beacons came into view. It was fantastic. The BBC had given me a camcorder to shoot footage and the pilot said: "Turn that camera off and we'll have a bit of fun."

He took us on a ride the like of which I'd never experienced. He nosedived down towards the Carmarthen Fans and skimmed the surface of the lake, Llyn y Fan Fawr. It's at the foot of a mountain that rises like a green wall, and the pilot banked the helicopter on its side as we skirted the mountain.

All I could hear was Scott screaming in the front, and Gareth and I were hanging on for dear life. There was a rambler on the mountain who dived to the floor as we came flying over the top!

● *From Anthony Buchanan: The Buck Props Here!, published by Y Lolfa, RRP £9.99.*

WE WON'T TELL, PROMISE...

We love hearing your stories and want to celebrate the characters of our great game in What Goes On Tour... If you have an amusing tale to tell, drop us a line. Mark your email 'Tour Tale' and send it to rugbyworldletters@futurenet.com



Words Alan Pearey // Pictures Getty Images

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO...

MAKE WHEELCHAIR RUGBY HISTORY

Ryan Cowling of GB wheelchair rugby reflects on that Paralympics gold

THERE WERE times, during the call to Ryan Cowling, when it was difficult to know whether moments of silence were down to the signal cutting out or the GB athlete becoming overcome with emotion. In truth, we think it was both.

Cowling was not afforded the glory of the try-scoring high pointers – Stuart Robinson, Aaron Phipps, Jim Roberts – in GB's gold medal-winning wheelchair rugby team. But his value to the squad

that reaped GB's first Paralympics medal in the sport was and is incalculable.

When it came to the crunch games, the semi-final v Japan and the final v USA, Cowling was on court for every minute.

Ask how the victory in Tokyo rates among his life experiences and he hardly knows how to begin. "There's still lots of things happening now in terms of the media, messages of congratulations coming in, it's a very surreal moment of my life that is difficult to explain," he says. "If you'd said to me six weeks

before that we were going to win a gold medal I'd have told you to shut up.

"I went for a meal last night with my family and somebody let it slip to the waitress and all of a sudden it was, 'Can we have photos with you? Did you bring your medal?' Being on the front page of the local newspaper, the entire page, is well, I've never experienced anything like it. The only thing that could probably beat it is the birth of my children."

Cowling says beating Canada first up was crucial because it took the jeopardy



What a feeling!

Cowling celebrates Team GB's gold medal performance in Japan

out of the USA pool game. GB let a handy lead slip against the Americans, losing 50-48, but beating Japan 55-49 in the semi generated a “surge of confidence” and when they faced USA for the second time they were ready.

“Losing to the US (in the pool) was almost a blessing in disguise; the way they played against us brought them back from a decent deficit, so we knew they’d use that same technique in the final. We thought ‘we just need to work out a way to stop that’ and we did.”

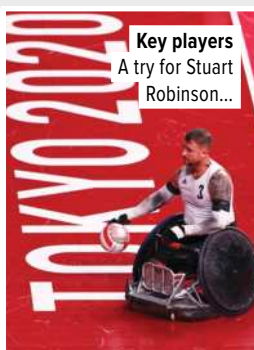
He attributes British success in large part to the galvanising effect of seeing team-mates working so hard under the double impediment of lockdown and a brutal funding cut. “I was seeing my team-mates doing their very, very best under horrible circumstances, and that commitment I found quite inspiring.

“When we came back from Rio (2016) and heard about the funding cut it was devastating. Soon after that we had a training camp. We were all there in one room and it was, ‘If we want to achieve anything in the next Paralympics, this is what we have to do’. We had less training camps, less staff, but everybody was so committed to the cause. Our (outgoing) CEO, David Pond, constantly found ways and means to get cash for us to train. He was phenomenal.”

A timely cash injection late in the cycle helped propel GB to gold and they celebrated with champagne, beer and pizza in the early hours. Cowling FaceTimed his family – wife Jo, daughters Amelia (18) and Eleanor (15) – before returning to the athletes’ village and he admits he blubbered like a good ‘un.

It completed a remarkable journey for Cowling, a Paralympic champion at 45 years of age in a sport he only took up “to lose a few pounds”.

His spinal injury occurred in 1994, when he was 18 and not long into a career with the army. He was on a training exercise, preparing for deployment to Bosnia, and travelling between Exmoor and Salisbury Plain. The troop carrier he was in was overloaded, having taken on extra equipment and personnel from a broken-down vehicle, and it



Key players
A try for Stuart Robinson...



...and Cowling with Robinson and Ayaz Bhuta at the end

came off the road. No one else was hurt but Cowling’s injuries were catastrophic.

“I’m paralysed from underneath my armpits, from one armpit to the other, there down. It also affects my hands, I can’t move any of my fingers and I have very, very weak triceps.

“That first 18 months was so difficult. I thoroughly enjoyed sports, I wanted to do lots of stuff in the army, and to have that completely severed whilst you’re sat in the back of a troop carrier is absolutely devastating. You’re learning to live all over again, learning how to pick up a fork or pull on your socks, very basic things. There are times of massive frustration and I think everyone (with such injuries)

has a period of that.”

He took up scuba diving, then taught it. He got married, had kids, moved to Matlock, Derbyshire.

WHY NOT HAVE A GO?

Cowling believes GB’s gold medal can boost participation in UK wheelchair rugby.

“Before London 2012 we had eight teams in the UK and now we have three leagues and 30 teams. I’m hoping this gold medal will do the same for the sport as London 2012 did.”

If you fancy playing or volunteering, see gbwr.org.uk/find-a-club to locate your nearest club.



Respect
Jim Roberts with the USA’s Joseph Delagrave

He first played wheelchair rugby in 2010 aged 34, after a friend invited him to a taster session at West Coast Crash.

West Coast play in Southport, about 90 miles from Matlock. It says much for Cowling’s loyalty that he’s stuck with them despite living far closer to the Leicester club. “West Coast have been exceptionally good to me. They’ve encouraged me, helped me buy chairs, which are expensive.” (His costs £9k.)

He joined the GB Talent team on his 40th birthday, made the team for Rio 2016 and has won two Euro titles as well as the Tokyo gold. His role isn’t passing the ball halfway up the court or doing amazing catches; he’s there to in-bound the ball to a high pointer and create a path through the crowds by blocking the opposition’s high pointers. In defence if he can stop someone with a higher points value than himself, he creates mismatches. That’s his job and he does

it magnificently.

We ask whether he’s conscious of being a role model for the older athlete. “Believe it or not, you’re the first person to ask me that. Which is quite refreshing.

“People ask about my age and the next thing they say is, ‘Oh, you’re probably ready for retirement’. There’s a massive number of people my age

looking for some kind of physical activity. Why not wheelchair rugby? If I can make Paris (2024) I’ll be 48. If I can do that at 48, I’m sure there’s a bucketload of people who can do a bit of sport, a bit of wheelchair rugby, as well.”

“It’s been surreal. The only thing that could probably beat winning gold is the birth of my children”

THE MAKING OF



WORDS SARAH MOCKFORD // MAIN PICTURE BILLY STICKLAND/INPHO

UGO

From his school's D team to Ireland regular, via the sevens circuit, we chart the full-back's rugby journey





G

KEENAN

IVEN HIS path to international rugby, it's fair to say that Hugo Keenan is something of a slow-burner. In his mid-teens, he could only make the C and D teams at Blackrock College; now he is one of Leinster and Ireland's most consistent performers.

"From 18 to the Ireland jersey, he has excelled and achieved at every single level," says Peter Smyth, who coached the Blackrock College team that beat Clongowes in the 2014 Leinster Senior Schools Cup final, a final in which Keenan scored a try. "My abiding memories of him in that last year are of him never making mistakes. I don't remember him dropping one ball for a whole year, whether a pass or a high ball. He was extremely comfortable in all areas of the game."

We talk to other coaches and team-mates who have worked with Keenan to find out more about the full-back...



Take to the air
Keenan perfects
his high-ball skills

Jump street

Keenan celebrates a try during Ireland's autumn win over the All Blacks



THE CAPTAIN

Ulster back-rower Nick Timoney led a Blackrock College side featuring Keenan to the 2014 Leinster Schools Cup title

"He was quite a late bloomer, so we only played together for the first team in our last year in school. He was quite young for our year and he was also a very good footballer by all accounts, not that I'd admit that to his face!

"We had a pretty good team at school, a lot of players playing under-age for Leinster. He was one who wasn't doing that, but he's turned out to be probably the most successful of the people we had. He really came into himself in that last year in school. He was so good for us with his footwork and how reliable he was; he didn't make mistakes and was really good defensively. It took him a while to grow into it; he'd not be the person people picked as an international superstar at 15/16, but when he hit 17/18 he started to show his potential.

"In fourth year, the third-to-last year when he was 15 or 16 years old, out of five or six possible teams he was in the very bottom one. It's funny when you look at him now – he's one of the first names on the teamsheet for Ireland.

"To end up in the Ireland team together was pretty crazy. We had a jersey presentation the night before where we (debutants) get messages from family and stuff, then one of the senior or established players says a few words. For me it was Hugo. He said he'd seen all the work I'd done over the years, a lot we'd done together with school and

the sevens, and talked about the fact he'd been there for a lot of the journey.

"I've known him for a long time and it was pretty special, having a familiar face through the whole experience, someone I've known for years and am mates with."

THE COACH

Nigel Carolan, now Glasgow assistant coach, worked with Keenan in 2016 as part of the Ireland U20 set-up

"Hugo was part of the age-grade pathway in Ireland, but he wasn't a player who would have stood out. He came into the U20 programme and as a character was very quiet. Don't get me wrong, he liked to have a laugh and a joke, but he was quiet-natured. We called him the Silent Assassin. He didn't stand out, you'd not hear him, but he had this ability to pop up somewhere, whether a high ball he was chasing or popping up on someone's shoulder or

a bone-crunching tackle... He did all his talking by delivering physically.

"Even in terms of selection for the U20 squad, he wouldn't be a guy who was first on the sheet, he would have been down the perceived pecking order. But when he got in the squad... The Silent Assassin. He was very unassuming but he came alive when playing.

"Playing New Zealand at the U20 World Cup, no one gave us a chance but he was one of the guys who came alive, in defence and attack. He was chasing one kick and launched himself with no respect for his own body, got the ball back by going above the head of one NZ player, tipped over, came out with the ball, presented it, then bounced back into position – just utter bravery.

"Other guys came in with a bit of a favourites tag, who'd done things for schools or in age grades previously, but he came in and grew into it. You could see the more he played at a higher



Provincial powerhouse Scoring for Leinster in the Champions Cup

FACT FILE

DoB 18 Jun 1996

Born Dublin

Position Full-back

Province Leinster

Height 6ft 1in

Weight 14st 5lb

Ireland debut
v Italy, 2020

Instagram handle
[@hugokeenan96](https://www.instagram.com/hugokeenan96)



level, the more comfortable he got – and his ceiling is way higher, there's so much more to go. He's a late developer and thrives the higher the environment.

"His personal skill is his bravery, his technical skill is the high ball – and to be good at the high ball, you have to be brave. He's grown in confidence and assertiveness, and particularly with the backfield, the responsibility of the position, it's building that confidence in the players around him. They have a lot more confidence in him and themselves because they know he's got their back. He's excelling in the position at the moment and it (the Ireland No 15 shirt) is his to lose."

THE TEAM-MATE

Skipper Billy Dardis played with Keenan for Ireland Sevens between 2017 and 2019

"I was at Leinster when Hugo joined and we played for UCD together. I remember playing in a game at Donnybrook against Old Belvedere and giving him an earful! It was one of his first senior games and he was on the wing and I was at full-back and he jammed in on a player on the opposition 22, giving their full-back nearly 20m of space to run towards me. That sticks out as probably the first time I spoke to him.

"He was a big part of us qualifying for the Sevens World Cup in San Francisco. He does the basic things really well. In attack, his passing off both hands is just perfect – he nails the right pass at the right time. He runs great lines and makes good decisions. One thing that stuck out was how good he was in defence. He was the best tackler – he just didn't miss a tackle. He was so reliable and solid, he always played 14 minutes, which is tough, to have that engine to play every minute of every game week in, week out.

"Preparation-wise, he was the first one in the changing room, doing foam rolling,

band exercises... He'd do everything he could off the pitch to make sure that on the pitch he was as good as he could be.

"He never did anything incredibly flashy, it was always simple. I remember we were playing Chile at the World Cup in 2018 and were losing by two or three points. We managed to get the ball back in our 22 and went the full length of the pitch, side to side, everyone involved.

"In the last phase Terry Kennedy stepped someone, passed to Hugo, who threw the perfect left-hand pass to Jimmy O'Brien. It was perfectly executed – he did the exact same pass for Andrew Conway to score in the autumn. If that had gone forward or to the deck, we'd have been knocked out of the World Cup but Jimmy scored the try and we won.



"A lot of sevens players could go to 15s and do well; Hugo's a great example of that. In sevens you're so exposed but you come out a better player – fitter, faster, your skills are put under pressure, your tackling and passing. He's now one of the best full-backs in the world. It's impressive what he's done in the last two years, becoming one of Ireland's most consistent players. It's great to see, especially as he's such a genuine bloke and has worked hard for it. He's a good man for a sing-song on the bus too!"

THE MENTOR

Stuart Lancaster has coached Keenan at Leinster since joining the province in 2016

"Hugo has made a seamless transition from the Leinster first

team to European rugby to international rugby. He's got a lot of physical, technical and mental attributes that mean he always performs at a very high level; he's very consistent. His skill attributes are his speed and also his speed endurance, his ability to repeat efforts; he works very hard in the backfield in defence. He's very good in the air, physically and technically he's got a lot of attributes you need as a top-end 15.


"The unseen work sets Hugo apart. We're a pretty fit team but he's right at the top of the tree. His real X-factor is his ability to work off the ball. He has the ability to step in as first receiver, too.

"He's also very hard-working, diligent, grounded – he's a pleasure to coach really. He'll review his own performance

without being asked, he'll come to the coaches for feedback, he'll analyse the opposition. So he's one step ahead; he's not just doing extras like high-ball work, physical preparation, he also has the mindset to watch other players and learn, prepare for the opposition, so he knows what's happening before it's happening.

"He's got a very good temperament and that's because he's always done the work. He's not fazed because of the confidence he can draw from training and playing with Leinster and Ireland; he takes that into big games.

"The main thing for Hugo was to build his inner confidence and belief, to encourage him to be more assertive in his communication. Young players often think 'keep your head down and mouth shut', but that's the opposite of what needs to happen to get in the reckoning for the first team – you need to give your point of view, communicate in training.

"He's grown as a leader over the past two or three years and broken through to such an extent that he's a key player in our team and the Ireland team." 



Sevens stage
Dardis and Keenan

"He'd do everything off the pitch to make sure on the pitch he was as good as he could be"



MY LIFE IN PICTURES...

MICHAEL CHEIKA

Interview **Sarah Mockford** // Pictures **Getty Images & Inpho**

Rugby has taken the Australian around the world and across codes. As he begins the head coach role with the Pumas, he reflects on key points on his journey...



← PUMAS TRAINER

"It was weird because a good mate of mine was leaving but at the end of the day I've got a good connection here. It's not often you see me smiling but there's a lot of that around these guys, like in this photo. I feel really comfortable in this environment, with these guys, and I like the people a lot. That's the thing that helps me – I like the people. It was an easy decision because I've had a strong

connection with the country and the country's players for many years, way back to my Leinster days and working with Felipe Contepomi.

"I talked to Mario (who quit as head coach). He did what not many people these days do – he did what he thought was best for the team, not himself. Not many people in the game these days do that, especially in coaching.

"Coming up are new opportunities for players to get better, preparing the best we can to make sure people enjoy the return of international rugby to Argentina – it's not been here for three years." →

← GETTING STUCK IN

"Players sometimes tell me to get out of the way, but I like getting involved in training. When I first went to Leinster it was something I did because I was young enough, late thirties, so I could jump in and do contact work. It was a bit of fun and a way to bond with players. Some players may not like you being there so you get out of the way.

"It's all a bit of fun and it's good when you get to be part of the team rather than just a figurehead. I still try to run around now but the lads in Japan are way too fast for me! Here with the Pumas I'll jump in; I did when I was helping Mario (Ledesma) last year."

DID YOU KNOW?

As well as Randwick, Michael Cheika played for Castres, CASG Paris (both France) and Livorno (Italy). He has been coaching for more than 20 years, starting at Petrarca Padova before stints at Randwick, Leinster, Stade Français, Waratahs, Australia, NEC Green Rockets and now Argentina.



← FRENCH LESSONS

"I actually loved that game because of that Stade Français team. We were beaten at the death (19-18 by Harlequins in the Challenge Cup final) and there was some controversy over a decision, but I enjoyed being part of it. You don't have to win for it to be a good memory and given the difficult circumstances of that season..."

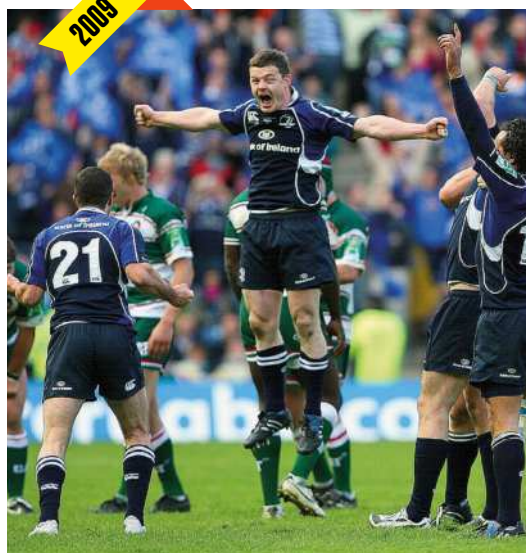
"We lost our owner and had to work to put together €10m, otherwise we'd have been relegated to the amateur divisions."

"As far as footy is concerned, when you join a team they're your team – the good stuff, the bad stuff, the lot. I had ups and downs there but it taught me a lot going forward. It was a difficult period for Stade but I enjoyed it. Especially coaching that guy (Sergio Parisse)."

→ JUMP OF JOY

"There are 30 seconds after you do something you never thought you could do of real pleasure (beating Leicester in the European Cup final). You rarely see it any more. I remember the birth of my kids, we didn't know the sex so that was a surprise, but now people find out so there are no real surprises. Here Drico (Brian O'Driscoll) is celebrating, 'Did we actually do that?'. Because we'd not done it before, we didn't know what it was like."

"Working with Drico was unbelievable. He's still a good friend today – he did a lot of great things for me and the team."



→ PART TO PLAY

"This is one of the photos I liked the least! The fact it's in black and white tells me a lot!"

"I was always a bit different, I used to say I was an outsider, the son of Lebanese immigrants. I'd been playing rugby all my life. I grew up playing league and started playing rugby (union) as I thought it could lead to a trip overseas, which worked out well."

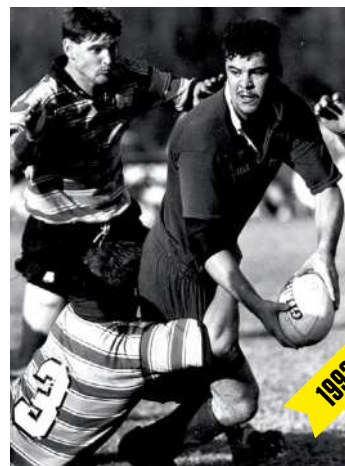
"I love my club, Randwick. It was a big part of my formation as a coach. Describing yourself is never good, but I'd say I thought of myself as a back but played in the forwards. My qualities helped me be a forward more than a back."



← NEAR MISS

"It was difficult obviously (losing the World Cup final to NZ). You never think you're going to get that close to something like that. I'm very grateful to get another opportunity now with Argentina."

"It was nice to win Coach of the Year but it's not related to why you're there; you're there to win the competition. We had a great tournament and it's good to reflect on those memories, it was just the last little bit. New Zealand were a great team in that era."





PRIDE IN THE ROLE

"There are no unhappy memories when you coach Australia. When you coach any team, winning and losing are part of the game, you just hope to win more than you lose. You're part of a team, the national team, and I'm

happy to share every game with those guys. You can talk about things from a performance point of view, but I'd never say the experience wasn't good.

"Look at the guy taking the ball at the front, Michael Hooper, and the guy at the back, Samu

Kerevi... I coached those guys and saw the effort they put in.

"Leading into that World Cup, we had a lot of obstacles put in front of us – by ourselves – and it was tough. If you go back to the pool and that game (quarter-final loss to England), it's all fine margins."

2019



BOYS IN BLUE

"As I've said, I was a bit of an outsider as far as rugby was concerned. As a player the Waratahs picked me up for a few games right at the end of my career, on tour when no one else was fit. I would have loved to have played more for them but they'd never give me a game! Then I started coaching there and I really loved it.

"That team we put together over a couple of years. It happened quicker than we thought and we just got on a roll. With momentum nothing can stop you and you're confident and that's what you can do (win the Super Rugby title)."



TALKING SHOP

"I've done punditry in the UK and Australia. I often watch footy on TV with the commentary off because some of the stuff is very opinionated, things have to be brilliant or rubbish. I said if I'm going to do it, it's not about having an opinion, it's giving inside information, what I see as a coach.

"I want people talking about what happened in the game, not what was said about it. I want to give people watching the game insight into what is going on and then they can have a discussion and form their own opinion rather than take on board someone else's.

"I've enjoyed the opportunities I've had and I really like what they're doing in Australia. They're broadcasting a lot more rugby, including club rugby, which is good for us because rugby isn't as popular as in the UK."



SING ALONG

"I don't think you're actually allowed to join the team for the anthem but I'd been talking to a guy I know from a long time ago who can have pretty crazy ideas. He said, 'You should go out and sing' when we were getting ready for this game (against NZ).

"I decided to do it at the last minute. They walked out for the anthem and I grabbed the other coaches and said, 'We're singing it with them'. It was weird because we had Mario (Ledesma), who isn't even Australian, and Tatafu Polota-Nau probably nearly had a heart attack when we walked out!

"It was bizarre how many people contacted me after that to say it was so good to see us do that." ➔





2020

← **DIFFERENT LEAGUE**

“I never thought I’d be able to contribute to my heritage with my area of expertise being footy and I can’t wait for it (to coach Lebanon at this year’s Rugby League World Cup). It’s not about balancing (his Argentina role with his Lebanon role); there’s no balancing, you have to go all out with everything and make sure you keep re-energising yourself.

“I’m looking forward to getting involved on the field. There are games coming up soon and there are great people coaching with me, as well as a great crew of players. I was back in Australia in January and we had a group get-together and went through a few things. They’re a passionate crew of guys and it’s going to be a great experience for sure.”

← **ICE BATH**

“This was year three (since he joined as coach) and it was the first time in a while that Leinster had lifted a trophy (Magners League). We’d done three hard years of work before then to get to this point and this picture is really good because everyone is smiling. That’s what you do it for.

“That campaign we overcame disappointment. We were very inconsistent, but that changed over the back half of that year and we won the trophy. It was an important stepping stone to winning the European Cup.”



2008



2015

← **BREAKTHROUGH**

“You prepare a lot as a coach and this David Pocock break came off the back of a lineout move, a trick play when it looked like we’d go round the back but went through the middle.

“You only have to look at the other players in this shot to know how hard it was to beat New Zealand in that era – Dane Coles, Kieran Read, Jerome Kaino... They were the best team for those seven or eight years and you had to be really strategic and aggressive to beat them, and this time we did (27-19). That was a fun game – the crowd loved it.”

FW



WAYS TO **SHAKE UP** RUGBY

Words Sarah Mockford & Alan Pearey // Illustration Jamie Latchford



Many feel rugby is in a slump, turning off some fans and failing to attract others. But things don't have to be set in stone. Here are a few game-changing proposals

Game Changers

1 Less is more strategy

Adding more and more matches, tournaments and events to an already overcrowded calendar is not the answer, even if there is a need to replenish Covid-depleted coffers. It can be hard for rugby fans to keep track of the different competitions taking place, the oversaturated market creating confusion, while clubs are often without their stars due to fixture overlaps.

People talk of the rarity value of the British & Irish Lions increasing its appeal, but that philosophy is not used in other areas of rugby. Less can be more – and if player welfare truly was the game's top priority it is an attitude that should be more readily applied.

Of course, the key to all this is the long-hoped-for 'global season', where calendars in the northern and southern hemispheres are aligned, Internationals don't clash with club competitions. Not only would it make fixtures more meaningful but it would put a stop to the endless rows – club v country, country v country, everyone v World Rugby – that so often mar the sport's image and make it look amateurish.

2 A stars and stripes World Cup

Not until the ninth Rugby World Cup did World Rugby take the sport's global showpiece outside the traditional market. Japan 2019 was a roaring success – and USA can be too. The States have a fully pro rugby league, magnificent sports stadiums and an appetite for putting on a show. The nation is ripe for rugby expansion. They're bidding for both the men's (2027 or 2031) and the women's World Cups (2029) and you just know corporate America would jump on board if they're successful.

Attendances for big Tests in the USA have been mixed, though there have been sellouts at Soldier Field in Chicago. A home World Cup could change all that.



Ready to cheer

USA rugby fans would welcome a World Cup

3 Broaden horizons

Zach Mercer swapped Bath for Montpellier in the summer, effectively ending any hopes of adding to his two England caps over the next few years. But what if he storms the Top 14 while the No 8s available to Eddie Jones suffer injuries or a dip in form? Is the RFU policy of not selecting players outside of England, or All Blacks having to be based in New Zealand for that matter, not too limiting?

Why should players be penalised for going overseas when those experiences can help them develop and upskill? Let's be open-minded about players exploring new environments. After all, we often praise coaches for learning from plying their trade around the world.

4 Research, research, research

It's been described as sport's 'gender data gap': the lack of scientific information around female physiology, the training techniques that work best for women, what the best nutrition advice is...

There must be more research done into how female players are affected by brain injuries, menstrual cycles, training techniques, etc. Data from male players can't simply be applied to women.

5 TMO Tannoy

When there is a TMO referral, the conversation between the officials should be played out over the stadium speakers.

At present, those watching on TV or listening on the radio (or fans in the crowd with access to a ref radio, which aren't available at all matches) are in a better position to understand what is going on and that shouldn't be the case.

Learning curve Zach Mercer is gaining experience at Montpellier



6 Humanise referees

Many moons ago, RW attended a Super Rugby game at Loftus Versfeld in Pretoria. After the match, the coaches had their say, then the referee came in to answer any queries the media might have.

The exchange not only brought clarity to certain decisions on the field but served as a reminder that the referees are intrinsic to the whole process: they are just as human as everyone else!

Let's hear more from the referees. They can play a valuable role in educating spectators and TV viewers, as Wayne Barnes and Nigel Owens have started to do in recent years.

7 Standalone window

The pandemic forced a rethink to the Women's Six Nations scheduling last year, moving it out of the shadows of the men's championship and putting those matches live on BBC channels.

A glance at the Allianz Premiership 15s fixtures suggests that the women's event may be played at a different time once again in 2022, from late March into April, and that standalone window should remain. It provides a bigger platform to promote the women's game and attract audiences, although the competition sorely needs more, well, competition.



Sounds good

Would you like to hear the TMO in stadiums?



Olympics profile
Lautaro Bazán Velez
scores for Argentina

One-sided scorelines are never a good advert, so there needs to be a rise in standards and investment too.

8 **Jonah Lomu Rugby 2.0**
More than 20 years have passed since *Jonah Lomu Rugby* was released and it's still seen as the best rugby computer game, despite all the advances in technology since. It's a huge hole in the market and now EA has acquired Codemasters, who published that Lomu game back in 1997, there is hope that the rugby equivalent of *FIFA* may not be too far away.

9 **Drop the mic**
Why do sports broadcasters keep intruding on people's space? Pro players preparing for a match don't want to have a mic shoved in their face minutes before kick-off. Their mind is elsewhere – as the TV interviewers should be.

Let's talk to players as they warm up!, it began. Let's talk to them as they come off at half-time! Hey, can we talk to them while they're playing? No, no, no! You'll not get pearls of wisdom from an athlete in game mode, so stop trying too hard.

Leave the playing field to the players, it should be their domain only.

10 **Supercharge sevens**
The Olympics showed the appeal of sevens, not just with the skills on

display but the characters involved. Yet this format has arguably been hit hardest by the pandemic, with many unions cutting back or even scrapping their programmes.

England have reinstated theirs – and with equal pay – but all sevens stars deserve proper funding. Rather than investing in new

competitions and formats, why not improve those we already have?

While on the subject of sevens, how about Team GB compete on the World Sevens Series so they're in a better position come the Olympics instead of players from England, Scotland and Wales coming together last minute?

Jasmine Joyce was the star of GB's recent win at the Vancouver Sevens but when those contracts end at the turn of the year, the Welsh flyer will be back to

balancing a full-time job with her rugby aspirations. Surely a GB programme, with help from the National Lottery, would work? Talent could be scouted from across the home unions.

11 **Go green**
As the impact of climate change continues to grow, we should all be looking to take steps to reduce our impact on the environment. One area where rugby could improve is kits.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Does rugby need to change? If so, how?
Tell us your views by emailing rugbyworldletters@futurenet.com or getting in touch via social media – @Rugbyworldmag on Twitter and Rugby World Magazine on Facebook

Firstly, let's get more shirts made from recycled materials. Fair play to adidas, who have used recycled plastic waste found on coastlines to produce jerseys for NZ's Super Rugby teams, Harlequins, Leinster, the All Blacks and Black Ferns, while Pau and Macron last year launched the first replica Top 14 shirt made entirely from recycled materials.

But there are still plenty of less sustainable options out there.

Secondly, do we need new kits every season? This increases waste, not to mention that it is expensive for fans.

12 **Board level**
We've been banging this drum for a while but we'll keep doing so until there is tangible change: there needs to be more diversity amongst the game's top decision-makers.

Strides have been made to increase the number of women on boards and committees, particularly at World Rugby, but there is still much to do. This isn't just about increasing female representation but that of people of colour and those from outside traditional rugby territories.

Players must be more involved too. A lot of internationals-turned-administrators were in their pomp in the Eighties, and the game has changed a fair bit since! Current and recently retired players need more of a voice at the table.

Current and recently retired players need more of a voice at the decision-making table

13 **Roaring Lionesses**
Okay, England's female footballers already have the name Lionesses sewn up, but that shouldn't stop

the British & Irish Lions launching a women's team. Talk of feasibility studies has been going on for two years; now it's time to start putting plans in place.

And those plans shouldn't be a replica of the men's format. Yes, a tour of NZ would be competitive, but not SA or Australia. The women's Lions should branch out to new destinations – France would make for an outstanding tour.

14 **Warning signs**
Brain injuries are rightly rugby's biggest concern. While lawmakers look to make the game safer with

a zero tolerance approach to contact with the head, technology is used to monitor impacts and World Rugby proposes a limit on contact training, the other crucial approach is education.

This is particularly important at junior level. *If in doubt, sit them out* is a mantra all clubs and schools should follow, ➔

Game Changers

➔ and resources on the signs of concussion must be easily accessible and continually promoted so people know what to look out for.

15

Stop stoppages

A match is supposed to last 80 minutes, with ten to 15 minutes for half-time.

These days matches can tick past two hours; the first half of the second Test in the SA-Lions series took 63 minutes but ball in play time for the entire match was a little over 26 minutes! This stop-start nature can be a turn-off, so how about we create more flow?

Clamp down on mini meetings ahead of lineouts, cut the faffing before scrums are set, put a countdown clock on the big screen for kickers – starting from when a penalty is awarded or try scored. That should speed things up, and add drama!

16

Cut the comms

This year's Lions tour – and Rassie Erasmus's waterboy role in particular – only served to highlight

a growing issue: coaches and support staff talking to players on the pitch.

Can the 15 selected not be trusted to make decisions or read situations? Surely key messages are relayed in the

There was no Triple Crown trophy until 2006 but no one would have celebrated any less before then

week beforehand and any pertinent points can be made at half-time?

Anyone who is communicating with the coaches' box shouldn't be allowed on the pitch. Really, it should be only the medics coming on (and only for injuries, not to yell encouragement from the in-goal area!) – and they shouldn't be passing on messages. If there's an injury, they can radio the team manager.

Let players react to what is happening rather than dictate their every move.

17

Less trophy hunting

The Calcutta Cup dates back 150 years. The Bledisloe Cup has been contested since the 1930s.

The Webb Ellis Cup is obviously the biggest prize in men's rugby. But these days there seems to be a new trophy invented to mark nearly every fixture.

Wallaby wonder Prop Taniela Tupou throws a brilliant no-look pass to set up a try for Marika Koroibete



PICS/Getty Images, Impho & Ken Magle

France and Italy battle for the Giuseppe Garibaldi Trophy, Australia and Wales have the James Bevan Trophy, Sam Whitelock lifted the Steinlager Trophy after the All Blacks beat Fiji in July! Too often the silverware is created simply to add a sponsor's name or ribbons, so players can pose for a team shot in front of advertising banners. But is it really necessary?

There was no actual Triple Crown trophy awarded until 2006, but it's doubtful that anyone who achieved that feat before then celebrated any less.

While we're at it, how about making players' salaries public to avoid rumours around cap breaches? It works in the US.

19

Maintain visibility

The loss of Premiership highlights from free-to-air TV is a blow. The fact most autumn Tests will be

on Amazon Prime may be cheaper than TV subscriptions but it's also not as accessible, particularly with the WiFi speeds needed for a clear stream.

Channel 4 proved with their coverage of the US Open tennis final how big an impact terrestrial broadcasts can make, as has the BBC's cricket coverage this year. Rugby needs to tap into that too.

Yes, highlights are often available for free on YouTube or social media, but not everyone has access or heads to the internet as a first port of call. Shows on free-to-air TV reach a different but important market. Even the appearance of ex-pros on big reality shows, like Ugo Monye on *Strictly Come Dancing*, can help boost rugby's profile.

18

What's the deal?

The RFU Championship and Premier 15s leagues have been described as the 'Wild West' in terms of

contracts. Ben Ryan has spoken out about Pacific Islands players being exploited by unscrupulous agents.

There needs to be more stringent regulations around contracts and agents both at professional and semi-pro level. Players need to be better educated and sanctions need to be stricter for those clubs or agents who exploit players.

Biarritz prop Guy Millar's PlayWize start-up is a great initiative, allowing players to create profiles and post clips, and clubs to search for players that fit the criteria they're looking for. A few diamonds are sure to be unearthed, and it removes some of the cloak-and-dagger around who is out of contract.

20

Prop stars

Last year statistician Russ Petty bemoaned the fact no prop had ever been nominated

for World Rugby's Men's 15s Player of the Year award in our *Rugby Rant*.

Yet modern props have probably upped their skill-set more than any other position, adding deft touches to their work at set-piece and breakdown. The dancing feet of Tadhg Furlong and the brilliant hands of Taniela Tupou are prime examples. More praise for the props! **rw**

Speed awareness
A countdown clock for kicks at goal could be introduced



DOWNTIME WITH... JACK NOWELL

“I’d like some inside knowledge on the royal family”

The Exeter and England wing talks pranks, teleporting and on-pitch exposure

Interview **Sarah Mockford** // Pictures **Getty Images & Inpho**

WHAT ARE the best and worst things about touring? The worst thing is being away from your family. With two little girls, it's tough. The best thing is the camp environment; it's a good place to be with the squad at the moment. The last time we went to Australia (2016) was one of the most enjoyable tours I've been on. It helped that we won 3-0 but the memories off the field stuck with me.

Winning makes a big difference but it's the time we spent in Australia and travelling to different areas... I spent time on the beaches; it's their winter but it's still as warm as our summer!

Who are the jokers in the England squad? Jonny May is one, although he doesn't think he is. He's very funny but that's just the way Jonny is. Harry Randall is cheeky – he lives up to the

scrum-half stereotype. Practical jokes? Rans is one who does that. Danny Care is always having a laugh. With Tom Curry, we laugh at him, not because he's funny.

Do you have any nicknames? Tevez. It's what everyone calls me in camp. It's because it's my middle name and I was so good at football everyone thinks I'm like Carlos Tevez!

Who are the best and worst room-mates you've had?

Anthony Watson is pretty good. He's tidy and likes to go to bed early, which is ideal for me. I like to be in bed nice and early, 9.30pm – training is hard enough so you need eight hours' sleep at least. The worst is Luke Cowan-Dickie. He's just turned up as I'm saying it! He's messy and he snores.

What's the funniest thing you've seen on the pitch? At Chiefs, an Aussie called Ben White played for us a few years ago. He didn't like to wear anything under his rugby shorts – no boxers, no Budgies, no Under Armour! He went up in a lineout and as he came down his arms were trapped and his shorts got pulled down – from the front as well as

the back. BT Sport saw everything – and we never let him forget!

What really annoys you?

Away from rugby? People who drive on the motorway with their window down. I don't know how they do it. **Any phobias?** Snakes and spiders! The last time we were in Australia, Dylan Hartley had a fake snake and ran into the team room

FACT FILE

DoB 11 April 1993

Born Newlyn

Position Back three

Club Exeter Chiefs

Height 5ft 11in

Weight 15st 2lb

Instagram handle

@jacknowell

WHAT'S ON YOUR PHONE?



Last person you phoned
George Kruis, about the Baa-Baas



Most important person in phone
I have to say my mother



Last person you texted
Luke Cowan-Dickie, to tell him I was by the pool



Last photo taken
Of my lip! I tried to get a pic while it was being stitched as well but it didn't work



Favourite social network
Instagram



Leap day
Nowell collects a high ball in training



Kit and caboodle
On his stag do

“I take my pillow everywhere. When I’m going away to hotels, it fills half of my suitcase”

with it. It looked real and we all sprinted out faster than we’d ever moved before.

What about superstitions? Not really. I take my pillow everywhere with me. When I’m going away to hotels, half of my suitcase is filled with my pillow.

Most embarrassing moment? Probably my recent stag do, when the boys – including Luke – dressed me up in a Munster rugby shirt and it was on every social media channel. The amount of Munster fans who saw me was one

thing, but then my face was blown up on BT, Twitter, Instagram... The fact my shorts were so big was another thing.

Who would you like to be stuck in a lift with? Who would I find out a bit of intel from, inside knowledge no one knows? I’m really interested in what the royal family get up to day to day. They do all the special events, but what do they do when they sit down in the evening, have dinner and watch *Coronation Street*? So someone who could talk to me about

the royal family.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

To fly. No, teleport. I don’t mind flying to places, like going on holiday, but flying back if I could teleport I’d get back quickly. Or I could just pop down to Cornwall.

The silliest thing you’ve ever bought?

I’ve bought a lot of silly things. I do it all the time and never use them. I’ve got a 50cc motorbike that I thought I’d use to go to training, but only when it’s sunny, so I probably use it three times a year.


If you could be one team-mate, who would it be? Someone like Maro Itoje or Marcus Smith as they’re like royalty. They walk down the streets of London and are more famous than Beckham!

Luke is saying I should say him but it definitely wouldn’t be him. I don’t want to know what goes on in his head!

What’s your favourite WhatsApp group? We Ain’t Leaving. It’s all mine and Luke’s school friends from back home. When we won the Grand Slam (2016), they came out to Paris to watch the game and we got them, 12 Cornish lads, into the nightclub later, then they refused to leave at closing time.

Your guilty pleasure? A Cornish pasty.

How’d you like to be remembered?

As a down-to-earth, fun guy. 



Favourite music app
Apple Music



Last app downloaded
Deliveroo – you can’t get it in Exeter so I always get it in London



Last song you played
Jack Johnson, *Never Know*

FACE-OFF

Should the 20-minute red card be introduced globally?

CAMPBELL BURNES



Editor
of *Rugby
News NZ*

SURELY IT'S a no-brainer, if you'll pardon the expression? A 20-minute red card punishes the 'transgressor' yet doesn't ruin the game as a spectacle. Imagine if Wales had had recourse to a sub when Sam Warburton was sent off in the RWC 2011 semi-final? Or if England could have put on their No 19, 20 minutes after the Charlie Ewels incident in the Six Nations?

The other key point is that a 20-minute red card allows for the fact that the referee might have got it wrong. This slavish adherence to player safety is seeing referees dish out red cards for mere accidents where we might see head clashes.

Last time I looked, rugby was a fast, dynamic game where occasionally the players will get it wrong in contact. Red cards should be brandished for malicious acts of foul or dangerous play, not for what Caleb Clarke did against Moana Pasifika where he just got his timing wrong and clattered into Tomasi Alosio's head. Incredibly, he was given a three-week suspension for this accident. But that's another story...

The real impact of most of the myriad 20-minute red cards dished out in Super Rugby Pacific has been minimal – the Blues still beat Moana Pasifika decisively, for example – but the principle still holds. The global trial should begin by August and the 20-minute red card should be enshrined in rugby law after the 2023 World Cup.

Let's show some common sense in a game that is fast losing much of it.

CHARLIE MORGAN



Senior Rugby
Writer at *The
Telegraph*

WHEN WAS the last time a red card actually ruined a game? When did a dismissal really rid a contest of drama?

You can have Italy's loss to Ireland during the recent men's Six Nations, but that was compromised by the fact that Hame Faiva had already replaced Gianmarco Lucchesi. By getting sent off – with complete justification – for a high shot on Dan Sheehan, Faiva caused the scrums to become uncontested. Because of a legal loophole, Italy then had to sacrifice an extra player. For all their industry, a 57-6 thrashing ensued.

Many, many other games have survived, and even thrived, amid red cards. In January, Harlequins dug deep to oust Exeter, who had lost Alec Hepburn on the stroke of half-time. The Premiership final rematch was tight and compelling.

Charlie Ewels's plight ratcheted up the Twickenham atmosphere by at least five notches. England lost yet produced their best display of the Six Nations; a remarkable win was possible until Ireland regrouped late on.

In 2017, Sonny Bill Williams's red card against the Lions was a fascinating plot twist. New Zealand sacrificed a forward, Jerome Kaino, and brought on Ngani Laumape. The best sides adapt to adversity with tactical tweaks, and the All Blacks so nearly sealed the series.

Besides, a 20-minute red card dilutes the consequences of actions that can ruin lives due to concussion. That is surely the most significant point.



Trial Down Under

In Super Rugby a red-carded player can be replaced after 20 minutes

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send your views to
rugbyworldletters@futurenet.com

HOW TO KICK OFF

Harlequins and Italy fly-half **Tommy Allan** gives his top tips on the restart

"You hope to only kick off once or twice in a game. When you have an important kick I think, 'I've done this hundreds of times in training'. There are breathing techniques that can help you to stay calm, but practise your kicks a lot and do the same thing you do in training on the pitch."

"If a team tends to kick straight back from kick-offs, you want to kick long so that you can have a lineout in the attacking half. It will also depend on the situation in the game. If you're a few points behind in the last minutes, you want to kick short and win the ball back. Most teams kick deep with long hang time so it can still be contested. That will give your wingers a chance to compete for the ball."

"For a drop-goal you want to hit the ball as soon as it touches the ground. A kick-off is different because you want to let the ball bounce slightly. That will make the ball go higher with a longer hang time. The more you let the ball bounce, the higher it will go. I'm quite a front-on kicker and my shoulders will point towards my target line. For a short chip kick that you want to land just over the 10m, you want to let the ball bounce and swing less."

"Sometimes you might kick to their best player so that you can tackle him and make him unavailable for the next phase. You could also kick towards the wingers, so the receiving team has to go through a few more phases before they kick as they wait for the wingers to get back in position to chase."

MARVEL AT THE MAGIC OF RICHIE MO'UNGA

Sean Holley on the All Black who's giving Beauden Barrett a run for his money



NOT SINCE Dan Carter burst onto the scene 20 years ago has an outside-half caused such a stir. Richie Mo'unga has dethroned Beauden Barrett from the most

prized of shirts, relegating the two-time World Player of the Year to full-back and a sabbatical in Japan in an attempt to reclaim what he now states is the position he wants to be considered for.

Barrett has a fight on his hands. Mo'unga has been lighting up the fields of Super Rugby ever since Todd Blackadder disregarded the notion that Mo'unga was 'too small' for the highest level and selected him for the Crusaders two years after he finished his schooling at St Andrew's College in Christchurch.

The recent Super Rugby Aotearoa and Trans-Tasman competitions have cemented Mo'unga in the hearts and minds of fans globally. He started in 13 of the 14 games, scoring six tries and 172 points. He beat more defenders than any other player across both competitions. This guy is a serious player. He provides an electric running game and shrewd tactical kicking. His option-taking in launching his back-line is superior to Barrett and the individual threat he poses with his acceleration, speed and box of handling and offloading tricks is something to behold.

He's also uncompromisingly tough, taking the ball to the line without fear. This he has taken into his defensive game, shoring up the ten channel.

When you analyse Mo'unga, you do so with a smile on your face. He tries things and they invariably come off! He also has the ability to tactically change his game. This is why ABs coach Ian Foster puts him at the heart of his team.

This month I've taken a look at one of Mo'unga's scintillating tries from a match against the Brumbies...



WHO IS SEAN HOLLEY?

A former Ospreys and Bristol coach who has also worked with Wales and is now a TV analyst

1

The adjustment and catch. Mo'unga pitches himself in 20 metres of space on the short side of an attacking Crusaders scrum, with only wing Manasa Mataele outside him. The beauty of this attack is that Brumbies scrum-half Ryan Lonergan has to stay the near side of the scrum to act as an inside defender – so Mo'unga can attack the back-rowers. He wants to get as flat to the line as possible, in motion, before flanker Henry Stowers breaks off the scrum. Unfortunately, the ball squirms out of the scrum and Bryn Hall's pass is inaccurate, so Mo'unga has to check his run and athletically leap to catch the ball (inset). He plucks the ball at full stretch before continuing his run.

COACHING POINTS Using different types of balls, such as tennis balls, is an excellent way of honing catching skills. Shaping the hands with the elbows bent is important and flexing at the knees can help a player keep the centre of mass stable and avoid reaching. Keeping the eyes on the pass whilst using peripheral vision to identify where defenders are is key. When training, use distraction techniques and pressure to make catching skills harder.

2

The fake pass into the step. Mo'unga gets straight into his stride and scans the defence. He sees that opposing fly-half Noah Lolesio has come across to mark him, with wing Tom Wright alongside him. The slight delay caused by the high pass has allowed the Brumbies to push up hard. Stowers runs laterally from the scrum and Lonergan has reverted back from his starting position to sweep behind the scrum to the short side for added protection. There is nowhere for Mo'unga to go and little room for Mataele outside.

Unperturbed, Mo'unga fakes to pass by showing the ball to the defenders, lifting it from low to high into one hand as if to pass like an NBA basketball player feigning to shoot. In the next split-second, he regathers as he shifts his weight onto his outside right foot, all the while giving the defenders the 'eyes' that he will pass to the outside. Stowers and Lonergan overcook their lateral movement, allowing Mo'unga to step inside them where there is a gap.

COACHING POINTS Poles and standing tackle bags are good progressions for footwork but there's nothing like using live defenders to practise how close a player needs to get to a defender before stepping. Get defenders to run different angles at the attacker so the player can learn when a weak shoulder is evident to step inside, like Mo'unga does here. They will get to feel when they can step inside and accelerate through the momentum of the defender.



3

The acceleration. Pace is largely an innate gift and Mo'unga has bags of it. His awareness of

Stowers and Lonergan over-running is first class and he knows he has the pace to get through as their momentum takes them to his outside shoulder. The next defender would usually be the No 8 (Rob Valetini) but he is nowhere to be seen, so Mo'unga flies through the hole.

COACHING POINTS Change of pace is enhanced by complex weight-training movements such as squats, power cleans and deadlifts. Plyometric exercises are used for explosive power, with variations of box jumps. Mo'unga is able to do this with the ball still in two hands and with fantastic posture.

4

The finish. Although the hard work is done, Mo'unga still has to pull away from the chasing defenders, including centre Irae Simone. Mo'unga must decide whether to veer away from the posts to outstrip Simone or back his pace with a direct route to the line. He chooses the latter option and cleverly transfers the ball to his right hand in case he needs to fend off Simone with his left. He scores with ease.

COACHING POINTS Ball transfer between hands allows carriers to offload with one-handed passes and to fend off defenders and maintain balance. Get players to hold a ball to their chest one-handed and quickly transfer hands with the ball still on their chest – this gives them a good feel. Start practising by standing, progress to running and then add changes of direction, defenders and then support players.

INSIDE THE MIND OF... DOROTHY WALL

Interview **Sarah Mockford** // Picture **Inpho**

The Ireland back-rower talks riding, radiology and rugby

"At 16 I started at my local club, **Fethard RFC**. My three brothers had played for years and I wanted to play instead of watch."

"My rugby highlight is probably the last few weeks playing for **Blackrock College** after coming back from injury. I was out for four months and everything was a bit low. So to get back to fitness and get a run playing in the AIL, at a real rugby club with so many wonderful people involved, has made me love playing again."

"I played **basketball** in school and trialled for Ireland when I was 16. Then I got into rugby and when I came back to basketball I was a bit too rough! I'd found my love in rugby but I think any ball sports benefit each other – movement, hand-eye coordination, reacting fast..."

"In my early years in sevens, **Ashleigh Baxter** and **Lucy Mulhall** were big influences. Their work-rate was hard to comprehend, how they pushed their bodies. In 15s, Ciara Griffin taught me so much too."

"My gran came over from New York, married my grandad and they settled in Tipperary. My mum and her brothers and sisters grew up with **horses** – showjumping, eventing. When we were younger we'd do tetrathlon, which is running, horseback riding, shooting and swimming."

"I like **cooking** and my favourite meal is a creamy chorizo and prawn linguine. My mum is a chef and my gran is known for her cakes. After I made my debut she gave me a box of brownies, so I offered them round on the bus."

"You have to **enjoy** it. My dad said that. So much more goes into high performance, but when you work hard and enjoy yourself that's when the top performances come."

"Having **new coaches** (15s head coach Greg McWilliams and assistant Niamh Briggs), you have to get to know what they want and have to adapt. They want to make us better rugby players and I'm excited to be part of it."

"I'd say I'm **outgoing**; I enjoy the social element of rugby. I'm a bit messy – I'm trying to work on that! I'm quite relaxed."

"As always the **Six Nations** is a mental and physical challenge, but I believe we have the talent, work-rate and resilience needed. I'm excited to see how we go. We're not trying to prove anything, we play for ourselves, to create something going forward. We're building this team."

"I'm studying **radiology** and have another year after this one. I'm on the slow track given my rugby commitments. I left the sevens set-up at the start of January to focus on 15s and finishing my degree. The college are very understanding."



WHAT GOES ON TOUR...

[Goes in Rugby World]


THE SCENE is a hotel in Dunedin in the days leading up to the first Lions Test in 1971, a shoo-in for the All Blacks – or so thought the vast majority of their supporters. Fergus Slattery and some of his fellow tourists are having dinner when they strike up a conversation with an employee utterly sold on the All Blacks' invincibility.

"The maitre d' at our hotel was talking to four of us on the eve of the first Test," recalled Slattery. "It was me, Gareth (Edwards), Mike Roberts and somebody else – and he stated New Zealand would win. We obviously went, 'Rubbish' and he was so adamant we inquired as to the best bottle of wine he had. Chateau Lafite 1934. So the bottle was put up as the wager."

It's hard to know how much Chateau Lafite 1934 cost back in 1971 but it would probably set you back a grand a bottle today. Of course, the Lions won that first Test. The visitors weathered an almighty storm and a try from Ian McLauchlan and two Barry John penalties saw them home 9-3.

And so the trip back to the hotel. Slattery again: "The four of us called the maitre d' over. He spent a few minutes in an emotional state, then he proceeded to open the wine and smell it and gaze at it. Then we said, 'Pour it out into the glasses'. But, no, he had to swirl it around in the glass first.

"We said, 'Pour it' and he did, reluctantly, and then we drank it – down the hatch in a oner. It was gone in seconds after 37 years of care. He cried."

Just as well he didn't put up another bottle on the outcome of the series. Famously, the Lions won 2-1 with a game drawn. 

WE WON'T TELL, PROMISE...

We love hearing your stories and want to celebrate the characters of our great game in What Goes On Tour... If you have an amusing tale to tell, drop us a line. Mark your email 'Tour Tale' and send it to rugbyworldletters@futurenet.com



Words Alan Dymock // Photos Getty Images & Inpho

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... WIN OLYMPIC GOLD

Fiji men are back-to-back Olympic sevens champions after triumph in Tokyo

JERRY TUWAI, World Rugby's Men's Sevens Player of the Decade, had been here before. An Olympic gold medal winner in Rio in 2016, he was best equipped after a 27-12 win over New Zealand in the Tokyo final to put everything into context. Shortly after the last whistle, the little master lifted the lid on just how tough it was to get to this point. Because while we all know how incredible Fiji can be at their physical, flowing best, it ain't easy putting it all out on the field.

"It's more special than 2016 because we have been away from our families for about five or six months," he said.

"I have three kids so it's really hard for me. We had our ups and downs in camp. It's a long story, I nearly jumped camp because I missed them and we are really close. That is why Gareth Baber is the coach – he grabbed me inside the camp and tied us together so we could continue the journey towards Tokyo."

We saw the singing on the podium – an incredible display of the intersection of faith, perseverance and togetherness that was at the heart of Fiji men's second sevens gold medal win. But while we saw this and clips from the islands, showing joyous celebrations, there was also something else to consider, underneath the shimmering of gold.

The team were locked in together for so long and during the Oceania Sevens, in Australia in June, they maintained a hostel as their base, turning its garage into a gym. It was tough but there was a Covid-shaped reason for all of this. Needs must in an unprecedented time, all while compatriots were suffering.

Tuwai dedicated the win to the people back home, realising it was a boon for an embattled nation, but added that his wish was also for all Fijians to be safe.

After having a few days to reflect on the glittering triumph, Fiji head coach Baber gave *Rugby World* some thoughts on this group of incredible athletes – officially on top of the world again.

Taste for gold

Meli Derenalagi, left, and Napolioni Bolaca



“There is nothing inherently individually special about this group but it is rather about what they have been able to create collectively,” he says.

“This is largely based on the foundations of the Fijian culture of family and community, and I believe that this element has been fundamental in enabling all individuals to play above their potential. Particularly when you consider how long they have had their worlds turned upside down, due to being separated from their families for such a long period of time.

“The team realises they’ve achieved something very special, not just for their own careers but for the Fijian nation at large across the world. It is in the Fijian DNA to support rugby from wherever you are and with such difficulties being experienced in Fiji at present, we just hope this enables the nation to do some healing and bind together.”

There was yet more good rugby news for the people of Fiji in these troubled times as Fijiana – their women’s side – shone throughout the Games to take a bronze medal of their own. Of course, once the event was over and teams were sent away (there was no hanging about in the Covid Games, with athletes having to depart within 48 hours), there was yet more quarantine ahead.

From their temporary base back on the islands, men’s strength and conditioning coach Naca Cawanibuka fills us in on what the mood is now, following the triumph.

“Staff and players are just relieved and grateful the mission is accomplished,” he begins. “We are humbled to be there to represent our people and being able to bring so much happiness to Fiji in such difficult times, as currently faced due to the pandemic. Apart from Jerry alone, the rest of the players were winning Olympic gold for the first time. We as a group are just so happy that all the hard work and sacrifice has paid off on the biggest sporting stage of all, in such significant circumstances.

“This is a very special group of men. What makes this journey significant is that we were, I think,



Man in charge
Gareth Baber

Rings true

The Olympic logo makes an apt backdrop to this try by Derenalagi



eighth on the experience ladder – we had a pretty young team.

“Three players, Sireli Maqala, Jiuta Wainiqolo and Iosefo Masi (Baleiwairiki), have never played on the World Sevens Series. And all three of them started in the final against probably the most experienced New Zealand team they could put on the park, which was a massive challenge for the lads. These lads all have special stories.

“Speaking to Masi, he never in his wildest dreams expected to be at the Olympics. Going back to this same time last year, he was on his farm on Taveuni Island. I’m so excited for the lads, for what they’ve achieved and worked for.”

Cawanibuka makes a point of looking back to 2017, when he says the groundwork for this second gold medal was laid. There

was so much done over the last few years to get the Flying Fijians to gold standard and, according to the assistant, none of it would be possible if not for the players who passed through the system, contributing, but ultimately missing the plane to Japan.

You realise that sacrifice is a major theme for this outfit, and so many figures gave up their time in order to help the collective. Straight after the gold medal win, Tuwai gave his parents a mention with this theme in mind, adding that his parents sacrificed to buy his first pair of boots – boots that have metaphorically carried him to two Olympics golds.

As for Fijiana’s bronze, Cawanibuka gives them their due too, saying: “We were cheering so hard for the girls on Saturday here in our quarantine hotel in Nadi. The girls were so amazing. The first time I worked with them was back in 2011. They have come such a long

way. Massive congrats to the girls who were in Tokyo and those who missed out.

“I would like to thank their families for all their support. Also a shoutout to the coaches and management of the Fijiana sevens group. They, like the men’s team, have been away from their families for almost 15

weeks too, and still will not see their families for another two weeks – that is sacrifice. But Fijiana sevens has arrived into the big league now.”

Could it be double gold, for the men and women, at Paris 2024? Look out.

DID YOU KNOW?

Fiji and New Zealand have played more Cup finals on the men’s World Rugby Sevens Series than any other teams. They have met 27 times, including in eight finals on the inaugural 1999-2000 series.

New Zealand edge the head-to-head with 14 wins to Fiji’s 13 and have 13 overall Series titles to Fiji’s four. Yet Fiji have won both Olympic titles to date.



Song of praise
Fiji give thanks on the podium

“Never in his wildest dreams did Masi expect this. Last year he was on his farm on Taveuni Island”

“ I TAKE PLEASURE

Giant lock Paul Willemse is a huge presence for France, but he hasn't always cast the biggest shadow. It's time to shine a light on him...

Words ALAN DYMOCK // Main Picture DAVID ROGERS/GETTY IMAGES



IN THE

small things

W

ALKING AROUND,

Paul Willemse steers the kind of frame that jams doorways, blots out suns and pressures

pavements. And yet the big man often wonders if he's been seen. Really seen.

"It's quite funny," Willemse begins explaining to *Rugby World*, "normally supporters and the general rugby public never pick up on all the small things in a game. So I might come off a game and people will say, 'He was quite quiet and didn't do that much', but in the back of my mind I know I stopped three mauls by myself, when they could have scored from inside the 22m. They could be playing a pick-and-go game and the player in front of me knocked the ball on because I gave him a small pull-back.

"It's interesting because I'm not the flashy player. But I take pleasure in the small things. Though normally it's the forwards coach that sees those small details, not even the head coach!"

Did you see those moments in the Six Nations when Cameron Woki was held up in the lineout for an impossibly long time and Scotland got done for touching him in the air, more than once? Sure, it wasn't exactly street-legal but France benefited from the referee's decision. And the idea was all Willemse's – he was lifting behind Woki, and the poor fella wasn't even forewarned they were going for it, as his locking partner just quickly assessed the situation and made



France

➔ the call to keep him up. And Willemse also reveals that he studies other locks in the pro game, trying to pinch aspects of their play and adding it to his own, making himself stronger, like a beefier version of the Borg in *Star Trek*.

Maro Itoje has come under his microscope for his defensive breakdown work, as have club locks who may seem unspectacular to you and I, but Willemse has noticed their fantastic driving technique at the maul. As he adds: "These small things make a massive impact in the game. That's why players like Itoje are really good, because they're able to change the momentum of the game with one small thing that nobody actually realised they did."

This is like a player opening their notebook to you. And yet the same man revealing it all seems somewhat taken aback when it is observed that he is clearly a cerebral and diligent player.

One obvious admirer is France head coach Fabien Galthié, who has made him one of his go-to starters in a Grand Slam side. And in Montpellier, too, he is a big presence. But it is perhaps Africa, where Willemse was born, that reveals a bit more about why he is like he is.

Off the top
Winning lineout
ball against Wales



"They said I was only good at schoolboy rugby because I was heavy, because I was 138 kilos"

Born in Pretoria, Willemse played his youth rugby in South Africa but then found himself in Namibia (where his mother is from) after his parents split up, chasing the ball as a 16-year-old. He was selected for a Namibia under-age side to compete in Craven Week, to mix in with the big South African schools. Based on his performance there, he

received a junior contract offer from the Lions – which necessitated moving back to South Africa to finish his schooling.

A lot of experiences crashed into each other in the years after. He had serious knee damage, a Currie Cup win, a Baby Boks Junior World Championship triumph, and won a contract at the Bulls in a short window. He gave it his all. But he was on the bench behind Flip van der Merwe, and when Springboks coach Heyneke Meyer identified a mammoth player pool to prepare for the 2015 World Cup and he wasn't in it, Willemse pondered his future.

On that time, Willemse reveals: "I played a lot of rugby and I played really well. But they still told me that I was too big and I won't adapt to international rugby and I was too heavy and not fit enough. Which was frustrating for me because I made such a big effort in my normal play, to show that even with my big weight

there was no place I was short in. Like, I was always in the defensive line, I'm doing everything. The only thing I'm short in is experience."

Then out of the blue he had an offer to go to France, with Stade Français. He never ended up going to Paris but he was sold on heading to Europe for some experience, and so Grenoble became the destination.

After six months, Jake White sounded the horn to come to Montpellier, where three of Willemse's mates had already inked deals. And the rest is history. He is still there with the Occitanie club and he qualified for his adopted home on residency grounds. Today he sees his family as French, his kids as French.

But to rewind slightly, the idea of him being too big, too oafish is undoubtedly an insulting one. And it is clearly something Willemse carries with him.

Asked if a large part of his career to date has been about proving people wrong, the second-row replies: "For me, it's a good thing. Because you need to find your motivation however you can get it. Luckily for me, that hasn't had a negative effect on me; in fact, it actually has had a bit of a benefit for me.



Big mate Post-match with France wing Gabin Villière



Eye of the storm
Ruffling Argentina

"I've had it since school. In schoolboy rugby, the backlash was that I'm too heavy or I'm only good at schoolboy rugby because I'm heavy. I was 138 kilos and the guys playing against me were like 60 kilos. I was actually heavier then than I am now... (He's currently 125kg.)

"Then I played Super Rugby and they said, 'No, he's too heavy.' And then my discipline was a problem or whatever. And I kept on climbing and climbing.

"But I'm so grateful today. My whole attitude towards France is thankfulness. This country, and especially rugby in this country, has given me so much in my life. The support from people now is really amazing, but it's cool that I had to work for it. It's nice that it's not just given to you. Because I can remember when I was first selected for a Six Nations that there were a lot of people who weren't that happy, you know!

"It's fine because everyone has a right to their opinion. I knew I had to earn the

public's respect. But that's what makes it so much better today, because all these people are coming to me now with so much support and saying, 'We were there that time, when everyone was saying we don't need another foreigner, and we supported you!'"

What interests Willemse is when people ask him why he chose France. As if he was left sweating, trying to pick which button to press: Boks or *Bleus*. Which of course he didn't.

The lock grew up dreaming of being a Springbok, like so many kids in South Africa. But at the core of that dream is the ideal of being the best version of yourself; of realising potential. Having been written off by some, he found people willing to help him find that potential. He valued that highly.

He freely moved to France, he says, because he was wanted there and it was new. He made some (no doubt painful) impressions in his first few seasons in the Top 14. It was working out well. And as he tells *Rugby World*, he made a conscious decision then.

"When I decided my life was going to be in France, I said, 'Okay then, I'm

going to go for the French team 100%.' And I just went for it.

"It wasn't like 'I chose France'. No, no, I chose my rugby. I wanted to play international rugby. And I maybe had to say goodbye to a dream I had to play for the Springboks. But I made that choice easily. I made a

decision knowing that it might open up a whole new dream for me I didn't even think of before, of new possibilities for me."

The decision to go all-in with France came at around the same time his first child was born – a time for serious reflection for most of us. But it wasn't like some idle musings.

The France coaches had opened up dialogue with the second-row. He was capped ahead of the 2019 World Cup but was injured before the big dance commenced. However, Willemse says, he was simply keen to show Galthié what he

was about before the former scrum-half took the reins on his own after the tournament in Japan. Which made it cool for a character like Willemse to be told by the coach that Galthié was a fan of his earlier stuff too. Willemse had been on his radar for quite some time.

And in 2022 he has rewarded that faith by tearing around the rugby fields of the Six Nations, clobbering blokes and making those little interventions forwards coaches so dearly love. France defence coach Shaun Edwards even revealed during the tournament: "We are a better defensive team when Paul is on the pitch. He is a very, very dominant character on the pitch."

Yet to speak with him, he talks in near reverence of other personalities. For example, when asked who his funniest team-mates are, he points to Damian Penaud of France and Cobus Reinach of Montpellier, for their happy-go-lucky approaches to life and the energy they bring. From the inference, you assume that should either of them stack it and fall over, the way they style it out would be equal parts funny and charismatic.

Willemse also mentions the sardonic sense of humour that Uini Atonio brings to things, but it's his and the giant tighthead's double act in the French scrum that has garnered the most attention lately. Willemse talks of the relationship in really simple terms. "I pride myself on having the respect of my prop," he says, then adds that he himself is "put there for a reason".

That reason has been to power France to a Grand Slam. And if it felt like work went unnoticed in the past, there's no way he is avoiding the spotlight now. Step out of the shadow, big man. **rw**



Hard to miss Willemse on Montpellier duty

FACT FILE

DoB 13 Nov 1992
Born Pretoria, SA
Position Lock
Club Montpellier
Height 6ft 7in
Weight 19st 10lb
France debut
v Wales, 2019
Instagram handle
[@paulwillemse4](https://www.instagram.com/paulwillemse4)

WORDS ANDREW LIVINGSTON // MAIN PICTURE LASZLO GECZO/INPHO

HOW TO START A GIRLS' TEAM

It's rugby's biggest growth area but launching a girls' and women's section from scratch can be daunting for clubs. We get advice from those in the know



Team spirit
Girls from Gorey RFC in Ireland

O**F THE** 400-plus clubs that have women's and girls' teams in England, I wonder how many originated in an ultrasound room? "It's a girl!" My jaw drops to the floor whilst my partner asks the sonographer to check again, just to make sure. I don't know what I was expecting, but as I sit in silence my brain begins to clatter with dreams and hopes for my soon-to-be-born baby girl.

Being selfish, I had always envisaged coaching my child's rugby team; a girl, however, makes things slightly more difficult. Bridport RFC, my club in west

Dorset, has a first team, a social XV and a thriving junior section... but nothing for women and girls.

We've had many talented girls begin their rugby careers at Bridport, but without the provisions for women's and girls' teams, they finish playing mixed junior rugby at the age of 12 and either stop playing the sport or move to a nearby club with junior girls' teams.

Only five years ago we lost an extremely talented girl to this process. Araminta 'Minty' May had exceptional prospects in the game from an early ➔

➔ age and at U13s moved along the coast to local club Sidmouth. In years to come I hope for there to be a complete pathway for female rugby at Bridport.

To be honest, I'm unsure if the women and girls of our small seaside town have a particular desperation to play rugby. But I believe I can at least try to convert a few non-believers to take up the game, even if it is in aid of being able to coach my daughter's team at the club I love.

But where do I start? Whilst scouring the internet, I've found plenty of clubs that have successfully built something from nothing. One such club that caught my envious eye was Eton Manor RFC.

"The motto that has kept me going – it's a cliché but it's true – is 'Build it and they will come'," explains Jackie Clune, writer, actor and Women's Rugby chairwoman at the Wanstead-based club.

From the addition of junior girls' rugby eight years ago, the club now has four girls' teams and a thriving women's side.

Clune says: "There were a few girls around the 11, 12 and 13 age group and we cobbled together an U13s team. I think one really good thing about girls is that they are good at roping their mates in and we just give them incentives, like you get a box of chocolates if you bring a friend to training."

Despite only ever playing seven minutes of touch rugby, Clune, who

Moment of inspiration

Danielle Waterman celebrates scoring in the 2014 World Cup final



"We need to make sure that the experience of rugby on the field in training and off it is positive"



Success story
Eton Manor in action

most recently played Mrs Lamb in BBC's *Motherland*, is passionate about rugby and the club that her four children have all played for. "If you can build a club that can have images of girls and women playing, where there are women on the committees, women on the exec, women coaches, women managers, you are building an environment where women can come and see themselves so that it's not so alien. It's that thing of

year and on that, you just go on ponytail watch and you pick out all the girls who look like they know what they are doing and you approach their parents."

I aim to not only form a girls' junior section but also build a women's senior team at the club. Everyone I speak to has testified to the effectiveness of hosting an RFU Inner Warrior programme to encourage women and girls to pick up a ball for the first time or reintroduce them

'you can't be what you can't see'."

Clune's biggest tip for recruiting girls? The ponytail watch approach. She explains: "I find that the older girls are harder to recruit if they've never played before, so you've got to start with them young. Primary school would be a good place to start. We run a touch/tag rugby festival for the local schools every

to rugby. Eton Manor's senior women's team was built off the back of one of these sessions. "The first one we had, 22 women turned up and at least half of them are still with us now. It is designed to appeal to women who are sporty but who may never have played rugby.

"It can be a hard sell. When we first started, quite a lot of the women were adamant that they didn't want to play full contact and those same women are now smashing each other on a Wednesday night at training."

Currently, the RFU is seeing a 17% growth year-on-year in participation for women's rugby. With this in mind, I asked the RFU's director of rugby development Steve Grainger how women's perception towards rugby is being changed. "About eight to ten years ago, the aim was to normalise rugby for women," he says. "This was bearing in mind we come from a sport that for generations was heavily male-dominated and male-orientated.

"We are also a sport where the majority of people come into it because there is a family connection. The way to do that is to change the mindset slightly. You just need a few people to turn the switch and momentum builds."



The Inner Warrior campaign has been vital in bringing in women who have never played. "The campaign started five years ago and it evolved from a purist sort of rugby drive to much more of a fitness-orientated session that has rugby as a part of it and then you begin to build on that," Grainger says.

"It's really about engaging, it's not about saying, 'Come along and we'll drag you straight into the team three weeks on Sunday to travel to wherever'. It's really about getting a ball into people's hands. Any of us who have played rugby, even if like me you haven't played for a few years, when I get a rugby ball back in my hands it just ignites something in me and I think a lot of people feel the same."

Making them 'turn the switch', as Grainger says, is easier said than done. Looking at the examples set by other sports, I need to make the accessibility of the club greater for more people. Grainger explains: "The other thing I'd suggest is touch rugby for mums. Something that hockey has done really well in their 'Back to Hockey' in local areas, they've targeted mums to come down, but not in the evenings or at weekends, they've started to do it 9 o'clock to 10 o'clock in the morning. It's like they are almost doing the school run and then they are going to do this."

Grainger tells me that one of the main driving factors behind the increasing participation numbers of women's rugby

is the success and media coverage of the Red Roses; this was reiterated by former England full-back Danielle 'Nolli' Waterman. She says: "At ten, 11, 12 years old I didn't even know that England Women had a team."

"One of the biggest catalysts of change for us was winning the Rugby World Cup in 2014. Then getting BBC Sports Personality of the year, having us up on stage twice. That massive platform that winning gave us was probably the catalyst to putting women's rugby into people's minds."

Three years later, in 2017, the Red Roses found themselves in another World Cup final in Belfast's Kingspan Stadium. This one they lost 41-32 to New Zealand but, notably, it was primetime viewing on ITV and 2.6m people tuned in to watch.

Since retiring, Waterman has taken up co-commentating on both women's and men's rugby matches. Despite her role in the media, she still enjoys getting her boots on and coaching. Her advice for me? Adaptability.

"I think it's being creative with your coaching for different numbers and being comfortable that you might only have two, four or ten turn up and you can still have a really fun session."

"I'm also a really big believer that it doesn't have to look like what we know as rugby. Take analogies from other sports. Some of the girls I have coached have superb hand-eye coordination from netball, they have amazing footwork from netball, they are okay with contact because they play hockey."

"Think about the things that make you nervous about rugby; (is it) falling on the floor? Is it the different-shaped ball? Is it tackling? If that's the case, then try to minimise those by making

FIVE TOP TIPS

- 1 Make sure there are female **role models** around the club – coaches, committee and posters of Red Roses
- 2 Run a taster session, like the **RFU's Inner Warrior**, at your club
- 3 Coach sessions in **primary schools** to reach out to kids who have never played the sport
- 4 Ensure the coaching sessions with juniors are **fun, engaging and easy to understand** for new players
- 5 Make any new women **feel welcome** at the club – ensure the clubhouse is up to date with female facilities, the bar stocks a range of drinks, etc

them comfortable. I've got a friend who introduces catch and pass at eight, nine and even younger and uses a teddy bear rather than a rugby ball. Instantly it's softer, it's easy, it doesn't matter if you drop it."

The 82-cap Red Rose leaves me with one final notion: "Far too often, women and girls are out on the back pitches, they aren't allowed to have the new kit, they aren't on the main pitch. All of those things that the boys take for granted. I don't understand that and I think that that's wrong. We need to make sure that the experience of rugby on the field in training and off the field is positive."

All my conversations provide me with invaluable ideas to grow the women's game in my small town of Bridport. The key tip I've picked up? The inclusion of women at Bridport RFC is only going to improve the club, so treat them like royalty and make them feel wanted.

I know it's a cliché but... Rome wasn't built in a day. I'm not expecting to have ten future Red Roses playing on our pitches by the end of the season, but hard work now will hopefully create an opportunity for others in the near future. Ultimately, whether my unborn daughter plays rugby, hockey or even ballet, to see any new faces play the game I love would be worth it. **RW**



Starting out

Minty May played for Bridport U9 before moving to Sidmouth

“I want to be the best



Blue streak
On the attack

seven in the world”

Words **Alan Dymock** // Main Picture **Dave Rowland/Getty Images**

Blues and All Blacks breakaway **Dalton Papalii** knows what he wants and he's willing to scrap all the way towards it

T WASN'T pretty. When Dalton Papalii rocked up to his first All Blacks camp for an end-of-year tour, the conditioners saw an athlete who, by their standards, was “terribly unfit. Slow. Average”.

After a standout campaign with Auckland in the Mitre 10 Cup, in 2018 he arrived... Only to lose puff at the bottom of a learning curve.

Since that day, says All Blacks strength and conditioning coach Nic Gill, Papalii has transformed.

“He’s just matured into a great man, a great athlete,” Gill tells *Rugby World*. “He trains hard. He is strong. He pushes himself. In training he’s fiercely competitive. From then until now he has matured into a great rugby player, from a physical perspective.

“I think he learnt a bit. He was just playing good code three or four years ago, but he realised he had to play good code and also physically be in shape so he could play his game for 12 months a year.

“He was very much playing well over the season, then drifting off physically, losing weight, losing condition. Whereas now he’s learnt and he’s got a good routine and I think we’re seeing that with him on the park. He actually plays really big. You know, he’s not a big man.

But he plays big. He is just one of these guys. It’s just toughness.”

Last year Papalii was not only a stick-on for the Blues but a Super Rugby Player of the Year nominee and All Blacks berserker. And at the dawn of a new Super Rugby season – rejigged once more, to include not only Kiwi and Aussie regulars but the Drua and Pasifika sides – he is expected to vandalise the opposition’s chances.

But while he may be oblivious to the praise he is getting for his drive, the man is not shy about talking about the sweat and sessions needed on the road to renown.

“I’ve set my own goals going forward and for me to get there, there are no shortcuts,” Papalii tells us. “The main goal for me is to be the best seven in the world. If you don’t have an aspiration like that in your position, you might not be going forward for long, you know.

“I’m probably not the only one with a goal like that. I think most boys will. But the other goals are small ones. Like getting personal bests in the gym, maintaining fitness levels. It’s just small wins.

“We’ve set goals (with the All Blacks) as a team that will help us be the best we can be, individually, and it’s about not skipping the hardship. You can’t skip it to get ➔



Blues brothers
Taking the field

➔ to where you want to because that kind of stuff you need to be good at to be 1% or 2% better than the other team.”

So what does that mean for someone like Papalii, in a technical sense?

“That’s secret stuff, bro!” he counters at first. “Nah, it’s the stuff when you’re waking up every day. We do so much on load and recovery, but it’s that individual recovery you put on yourself. We get some awesome time off, and while you’re recovering you’re hitting the books, you’re studying the other team’s habits, all the little s*** that comes with it that you do to be better than your opponent. That is what I think, anyway.”

Discussions on this may not seem revolutionary for elite sport, but you would be surprised at how far the science of recovery has leapt. In a *Sports Illustrated* feature entitled *How Long Can We Play?*, Chris Ballard writes: “LeBron James, who played MVP-calibre ball last year at 36, reportedly spends more than \$1m of

his own money on his body annually. He employs a personal biomechanist (former Navy SEAL Donnie Raimon), receives liquid nitrogen treatments to reduce inflammation and enjoys the benefits of expensive hot and cold tubs in his home. Steph Curry (still relatively young at 33) swears by float spas and cryotherapy. Roger Federer (40) owns a hyperbaric chamber and sleeps 10 to 12 hours a night in absolute darkness.”

It’s something the ambitious pros in our midst should consider, if they don’t just want to leave everything up to their coaches and conditioners.

Albeit on

a much cheaper scale – come on, it’s still rugby union we are talking about.

So while in December New Zealand Rugby agreed to sell its 40% share in the Blues to The Better Blues Company Ltd, a consortium of local investors who are hell-bent on “providing stability, support and continuity”, should players like Papalii take as much responsibility as they can for their own improvement?

“Yeah, 100% because everyone is different,” the back-rower says. “It’s a hard one to define because you’ve got to keep trying different stuff. But eventually when you do get to a

professional environment you have a sort of idea. The good thing about being in rugby in New Zealand is that you’ve grown up, you’ve got into those areas and you know if you’ve got a little niggle you go rehab it. But the modern athlete nowadays is finding out how their bodies react to different recoveries.

“I’ve tried different things. Like I got into meditation. I talked to some of the older boys and they were telling me



Trophy hunter
Winning Super Rugby
Trans-Tasman

FACT FILE

DoB 11 Oct 1997

Born Auckland

Franchise Blues

Position Back-row

Height 6ft 4in

Weight 17st 11lb

New Zealand debut

v Japan, 2018

Instagram handle

@daltonrpapalii



Hard yakka
Papalii in the gym

about it because I'm a real bad sleeper. So a couple of nights I tried meditation before I went to bed and I'm finding that I get a better sleep. Better sleep means better performance when you wake up – you can then work harder for longer. All that little stuff adds up."

Spending a couple of bucks on an app to help relax your mind and meditate before bedtime is a world removed from a cool mil on super-cold chemicals and Navy SEAL staff. But you find your edges along any tables you can. And if it's a start, it's one we wouldn't even have been discussing 15 years ago.

Papalii has done a little visualisation before games but it's about finding what fits. It's the breathing techniques of the 'medication' he likes, and he has sought other approaches. He tried the

On this, Papalii suggests that while his chop tackle that just drops an attacker instantly could improve, really he needs to sharpen his assessment of the right tackle style to use in the heat of the moment. But he goes on to say: "It's just one of many weapons. What gets you here is that you're really a good player.

"So your basics are really good but to get even better you've got to pick up the advice of the coaches, players, do your own learnings. For me it's not about unlearning anything but to just pick up these things on the way to add to your toolkit."

With all this considered, it wouldn't shock you if Gill's words on the 2018 iteration of Papalii would spur him on. The Auckland native talks about how old friends of his can ground him, and

"I tried meditation and I get a better sleep. That means better performance when you wake up"

Wim Hof approach last year, which was an interesting dalliance, and at one point he found he could hold his breath for longer after experimenting a bit.

But at just 24, the Blues breakaway has a lot more information gathering to do. And this is hardly a journey where you can get somewhere and scream, 'I've cracked it!' For a start, in going through the wringer over a decent professional rugby career, your body's physical tolerances will change as much as any law directives from match officials ever can. And while there is the body preparation side, you cannot ignore match-ready techniques.

if he's ever dizzied by photo requests or autograph seekers, they will set him straight. Being a hunter and fisherman is not a surprising look for him either.

But it's family time he craves, amongst his parents, two sisters and close-knit network of cousins. You had better be prepared to eat at their get-togethers. Of course, that Papalii work ethic may have clocked off slightly by the time he gets to the kitchen. He is, he admits, just sitting and being fed at these meets.

"But don't worry, I'm doing the dishes after!" he adds quickly, sensing that his appetite for graft may be questioned. There's always work to be done. **EW**

7 SEVEN HEAVEN

Papalii gives us two opensides he respects – one past, one present

ARDIE SAVEA

"I love learning off him. In my opinion he's the best number seven at the moment. The good thing about him is that he wants you to get better around him. He is awesome, not just his rugby ability but as a bloke as well."



Versatile
Savea plays No 8 too

SCHALK BURGER

"He had an intensity as well as a physicality. I base my game on trying to be the most ruthless out there and to see how he played the game, he was such a dominant player. You can teach someone all the skills in the world but not that."



URUGUAY

Words & Pictures **Frankie Deges**

Rugby World heads to Montevideo to catch up with *los Teros* following their 2023 World Cup qualification and to find out how the sport is growing in the country...



Man in charge
Esteban Meneses

On your marks...
Uruguay players train and (top) messaging around the stadium



IT IS Wednesday morning and *los Teros* are under the Montevideo sun. Temperatures will soon hit the thirties; the heat that comes up from the artificial field at Estadio Charrúa is brutal. Grey T-shirts soon turn to black with the sweat of a squad putting the finishing touches to their preparation before they leave for Europe and a three-game November window. It wasn't a successful trip on the results front, but it is all about taking steps towards the big goal.

This same stadium showcased the best of Uruguayan rugby as the USA Eagles were put to the sword and, for the first time, Uruguay secured their World Cup place almost two years ahead of the showcase tournament. That afternoon in October is already part of the game's folklore in what will be one of the smallest nations competing at France 2023.

This will be their third consecutive tournament and fifth overall. You can feel it in the players, in the fans, even in Uruguay, the small South American



Double vision Andrés Vilaseca in front of a poster

country nestled between rugby's big brother Argentina and a big brother in everything but rugby, Brazil.

"The goal was always to qualify as Americas One once Japan 2019 finished," says Uruguay's amiable head coach Esteban Meneses. "As the draw was announced, and I knew I wanted to be there, I got a message from (captain) Andrés Vilaseca saying that we had to get into Pool A."

Argentina-born and with his family across the widest river in the world, the River Plate, Meneses's commitment has been huge since taking over in 2016 from Pablo Lemoine, who kick-started the high-performance programme in Uruguay. It took Meneses one month after the tournament in Japan, where they recorded a memorable win over Fiji in the hot sun of Kamaishi, to decide to go for a second spin.

"Covid-19 interfered but Uruguay had good programmes in place to control it and players managed to stay →

➔ focused during 2020; in 2021, with the Superliga Americana de Rugby, we managed to use it to our advantage in preparing the national team.”

SLAR, as it is known, is the first professional league in South America. It lasted three games in its inaugural year; then last year, the six franchises, one each from Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina and Colombia, showcased their deep dedication to the game by spending a little over two months in a controlled sanitary bubble, first in Santiago, Chile, and then in Montevideo.

“Franchises are run by the unions, which is very important,” explains *Teros* captain Vilaseca over lunch in the bowels of Charrúa stadium. After a hard training and gym session, players stay for food at the home of rugby in Uruguay.

A former Major League Rugby player, Vilaseca believes “there is bigger sense of belonging in SLAR than in MLR and it allowed us to prepare for our big goal, which was the World Cup qualifier”.

“It hurts still that with what we’ve achieved, we aren’t yet recognised as we should be” **Andrés Vilaseca**

Indeed, SLAR played a big role on the road to France 2023. It helped Uruguay secure their place in Pool A alongside hosts France, New Zealand, Italy and Namibia, and it also assisted Chile in their series win over Canada, which meant the Canucks will miss the World Cup for the first time. Chile later overcame the USA in a nailbiting play-off to grab the Americas Two spot and a place in Pool D next year.

Meneses chips in: “We used SLAR to work on our defence and our set-piece. We couldn’t show much as we first had to play Chile and Brazil in the region and they were also using the tournament to attain their goal.”

In previous journeys to the World Cup, the road taken was always longer and harder. For 1999 and 2015, it was through the repêchage; for 2003 it required winning three consecutive games at home after three on the road; and to go to Japan, they had to beat Canada home and away.



This time it may have been quicker but qualifying was not a flash-in-the-pan thing. Players are now professionals; they are not earning the euros or pounds on offer in Europe but they are capable of living and studying at home.

Vilaseca, who played against Romania in November before returning home to be at the birth of his first child, is also completing a business degree. “Life is

to be enjoyed step by step,” he says. Should he lead *los Teros* in France, he’d be following the footsteps of older brother Santiago, who captained his nation at RWC 2015. “It is a huge honour and this is a great team to captain. We constantly say that we are all responsible for making it work.”

His presence as a leader is very clear. You can find his face on six huge signage boards around the stadium – with other players. When asked to take a photo with one of them he laughs. “It is a bit embarrassing,” he admits.

He may not be a very vocal captain, but “he is an incredible leader that lives for the team and the captaincy at every training,” says Felipe Arcos Pérez, one of the new generation of Uruguayan players. The captain himself pays tribute to the support and work done by the leadership group. “It is a good team, a good staff. We all push together.”

This has given them the chance to play against France in Lille on 14



Well-equipped set-up The pristine pitch at Estadio Charrúa in Montevideo and (inset) the gym facilities



Artist's impression
A painting by Carlos Páez Vilaro

September 2023, six days later against Italy in Nice, Namibia at the OL Stadium in Lyon on 27 September and the All Blacks, who will lie waiting at the same ground eight days later.

In a country of good sportsmen and women, but in which only football transcends, to have qualified so far ahead of the tournament is a huge positive. Yet Vilaseca says: "It hurts still that with what we've achieved, we aren't yet recognised as we should be."

This will probably change over the next couple of years. Amongst those celebrating their win against the USA was national president Luis Lacalle Pou, a former rugby player "until my fourth or fifth fracture," he laughed when speaking to the media.

Thanks to Lacalle Pou's government, Uruguay – and the Charrúa stadium – was able to host a number of regional and international events as early as September 2020 when Covid was still far from being beaten. The Unión de Rugby del Uruguay also works hand-in-hand with the National Sporting Body, including in five youth detention centres and six prisons, taking the game's values to inmates.

If they are to achieve their goal of qualifying directly for RWC 2027 by

the middle and upper classes, it has spread throughout the country.

Development manager Sebastián Perona explains that rugby has reached every corner of Uruguay, from boys and girls to senior players. The exposure of having a weekly game on one of ESPN's satellite channels has helped



Kicking on
Federico Favaro

the promotion of the game. He adds: "We are teaching rugby in clubs, schools, parks, taking the game to the people rather than waiting for them to come. Of course, Covid-19 stopped some of the momentum we had, but we are back on our feet with very good projects all around the place."

With six development officials under his wing, Perona adds: "Our community programme has been going for eight years and amongst the many positives is that we managed to change the

perception of those who didn't know the game. We grow year by year. There are 6,000 children, 2,500 age-grade players and 1,500 seniors. And there are 7,500 participants in different education and community programmes."

The national tournament has 18 clubs – 12 come from Montevideo, where over a third of the population lives, and six come from the interior. The furthest distance between two clubs is 500km. There are many more clubs in local leagues, too, while schools are also a crucial part of the pathway.

As the game grows, so do the needs. Eighteen players have professional contracts while the URU's budget has multiplied ten times in the past 15 years. And high performance now starts with the U16s, the Charrúa stadium nurturing the current and the next generation. It's not only the field but the large gym, medical facilities and everything else in the rugby centre of the country. "It takes me five minutes to get here. Seven if the traffic light goes red," laughs Vilaseca.

The gym epitomises all that is good about the team and their love for the game. Mantras hang from the walls, including the most recent one: *objetivo inamovible* – immovable goal.

"We now have to find a new one. For Japan, it was 'shock the world'," explains Meneses. These mantras come out of group activities led by Juanjo Grande, the team psychologist who is adored by players and staff. "We'll come up with a new one when the time is right. We'll be ready and very hungry," says Vilaseca.

Before departing, his coach adds: "Pool A is an opportunity to narrow the gap with Italy. We'll work for that. It will be great to play France and the All Blacks but that dream lasts two seconds. We have to be ready and up to the task. The difference with Tier One teams is 30 to 40 points. We have

to be as competitive as we were in Japan."

Having beaten Fiji 30-27 at the last World Cup, the four-day turnaround before their next game was too short and Georgia beat them 33-7. The next two games showed what more competition could do for *los Teros*: defeats by Australia (45-10) and Wales (35-13).

"The more we can compete, the better we will be," concludes coach Meneses. **RW**



Hard graft
Diego Magno on the ball in training

TYPICAL SCHEDULE

- 7.30am Staff meeting
- 8am Physio
- 8.30am Monitoring
- 8.45am Front-row meeting
- 9am S&C-coaches meeting
- 9.15am Units work forwards/
Gym backs
- 10am Units work backs/
Gym forwards
- 11am Rest and snack
- 12pm Video presentation
- 12.15pm Team training
- 1.15pm Lunch
- 2pm Team meeting

DOWNTIME WITH... LOUIS REES-ZAMMIT

“I was meant to be a girl! I didn’t have a name for two weeks”

The Wales speedster on surprises, safaris and superpowers

Interview Sarah Mockford // Pictures Getty Images

W **HAT WAS the off-pitch highlight of the South Africa tour?** We did a little safari. We saw most of the animals, just not elephants. A few of the boys went on it and it was a good laugh.

What was the best animal you saw? A lion. They’re big and scary.

Who are the jokers in the squad? Tomos Williams, he doesn’t stop rinsing everyone. Dillon Lewis, he’s pretty hilarious. There are a lot of people you don’t think would be funny but the one-liners they come out with are hilarious. Biggs (Dan Biggar) is actually really funny. We all rinse each other.

Any practical jokes? It’s always the same people who do things but I’d never snake on them! It’s things like hiding kit or hiding boys’ sliders or shoes, then they get really angry.

Do you have any nicknames? Everyone just calls me Zammo. Or Zam. It’s anything to do with my surname. I’ve not got any funny ones.

What about phobias? What are you scared of? I’m scared of a lot of things. I’m scared of spiders, I really don’t like spiders. And snakes are the worst.

What really annoys you? People who chew loudly. You’re sitting at a table and someone is chewing really loudly.

Do you have any superstitions? No, I haven’t got any. I’ve always believed that if you have none, then you’ve got nothing to worry about. The boys who put salt in their hand and throw it over their shoulder or things like that... Then everything becomes an issue.

What’s your most embarrassing moment? Can it be when I wasn’t born? It’s not that embarrassing but I was meant to be a girl, the scans showed that I’d be a girl, so when I was born and they realised, my mum started crying. My dad was over the moon but Mum was fuming! They had called me Georgia and painted my room pink. They’d bought me girls’ stuff, girly coats.

Did they dress you in the girls’ coats? 100%! And I didn’t have a name for two weeks. My dad’s middle name is Luis, although he spelt it wrong on the birth certificate – his is spelt Luis and I’m Louis.

Who would you like to be stuck in a lift with and why? Cristiano Ronaldo. He’s my sporting hero. I’ve got a

FACT FILE

DoB 2 Feb 2001
Born Penarth
Position Wing
Club Gloucester
Height 6ft 3in
Weight 15st 1lb
Instagram @lrzammit

WHAT’S ON YOUR PHONE?



Last person you phoned
 Johnny Williams



Most important person in phone
 My brother, Taylor



Last person you texted
 My family group chat. I’m a family man



Last photo you took
 It was from training



Favourite social network
 Instagram. It was TikTok but the feed messed up when I didn’t use it

In full flight
LRZ en route to a try against the Boks



“I love Skips. They melt on your tongue and I could probably eat ten bags a day. I don’t but I could!”

different rugby hero – that’s Shane Williams – but I love Ronaldo.

What would be your Mastermind specialist subject? Probably Manchester United. I’m a die-hard fan.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be? To be invisible. I would say being able to fly but I’m scared of heights, so I don’t think that would be great for me. Being invisible I could prank everyone, I could go

everywhere I wanted, sneak into clubs, listen to anyone’s conversations...

What’s your guilty pleasure? Chocolate. Actually, I’m more of a crisps man. There are so many types. I love Skips. They melt on your tongue and I could probably eat ten bags a day. I don’t but I could!

If you could be one of your team-mates, who would it be? The one person I’d want to be is Dan Biggar because he’s such a legend. He’s the nicest man you’d ever meet, a good family man, he loves his family, he loves the boys.

I wouldn’t want to be any of the forwards because I wouldn’t want to feel what it’s like to be in a scrum.

Who would be your three dream dinner party guests? Is this clubbing after as well or just a dinner party?


You can hit the club... Ricky Gervais. He’d actually be hilarious at dinner as well. My brother – we do everything together. And Kevin Hart because I could definitely rinse him.

Who would be the best dancer out of that four? Definitely not me!
If your house was on fire, what’s the one thing you’d save? People and pets are safe. I was going to say my dog. My PS5, maybe a TV... There are a lot of things thinking about it. My first cap.

I would probably choose something meaningful but I can’t think what that one thing would be right now.

What would you like to achieve outside of rugby? I want to be a billionaire.

Any thoughts on how you’d do that? Yes, but they can’t be told. No, I don’t have a clue – I’m only 21.

Do you have any surprising hidden talents? I probably do but I can’t think of them. I tend to be more spontaneous, so I don’t have one (party trick) that I turn up with. But if someone asked me to do something... 



Favourite music app
Spotify



Last song you played
Cucurucu by Nick Mulvey. It’s been played all tour so is stuck in my head



Favourite WhatsApp group
Probably the boys back home, school friends

Should the top international stars play Tests for free?

DAN LEO

TIM SWINSON

THE NEED for changes to eligibility laws and the lack of profit share amongst unions are symptoms of inequalities in our game. And when there is money it should be going into the grass roots to keep games going – but here in Australia, a huge amount of money generated goes back into the Wallabies. And then people wonder why their community game needs saving?

It's time to reassess what our expectations of international rugby should be. With my Pacific Island head on, Test rugby has become an extension of professionalism, and it's just like club rugby. So why not let the clubs worry about paying players and keep Internationals pure?

A lot of players see Tests as a way to make a living as opposed to honouring the essence of what Test rugby has always been. We need to protect the purity of playing for your country – for the love of your culture.

The decision to choose your first Test nation, often a Tier One nation, is made when you're young and poor. The encouraging thing is that we may see more pure pride in the jersey after recent changes, but we can still have a team whose players earn close to £30,000 for a game facing someone who gets a few hundred.

Let the clubs deal with money. They can pay the players. But when it comes to lining up for Internationals, we need to protect the integrity and the purity of that decision, to make it a special one. We should start with reduced fees.



Chairman of
Pacific Rugby
Players Welfare



Chairman of
Rugby Players
Scotland

THE RUGBY world is one of increasing separation between the poorer nations and those with commercial clout. This separation is commonly defined by a comparison of match fees between Test nations, often cited as a significant, if not the only, reason for the migration of top players towards wealthy nations.

However, a reduction of match fees for larger nations would simply amount to exploitation of different, if not all, players. The players are the product that generates the financial success of larger nations. This, combined with the

increased pressure and scrutiny associated with Test rugby, means a player must be compensated for their role in powering a commercial machine.

Likewise, elimination of International match fees would not stop a procession of players to wealthy nations. While match fees are easily highlighted, commonly the predominant reason that players move country is to provide for their families. This move rarely starts with a guarantee (or

even a dream) of playing for another international side. Rather, it's an offer to be paid to play club rugby that will often be the catalyst for the move.

While the aim of reducing the current financial gulf between nations is laudable, World Rugby removing International match fees is a worst-case scenario – neither preventing player migration nor rewarding players for the commercial success they create.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send your views to
rugbyworldletters
@futurenet.com

HOW TO STRIP THE BALL

Scarlets and Wales centre **Scott Williams**'s top tips for ripping possession in the tackle

"It's hard to strip the ball if the carrier is moving forward. If your co-tackler has won the collision, you can get your shoulder into the carrier's chest. That will separate the carrier from the ball and the strip becomes easier. I like to rip the ball upwards; you need to do it aggressively."

"When I'm going to strip the ball, I'll be the second tackler. If I'm the only defender, I want to be making the tackle and not worrying about the strip. If a tackler went low, I'd go high and attack the ball. Usually if I'm with a forward, I know they will tackle low so I can go for the strip. You will only get a split-second to make that decision. Once you start to pull at the ball the carrier will tighten his grip, so you want to catch them unaware."

"When you have won the ball, you want to move it to someone who has better vision than you. We usually work on moving the ball two passes away from the turnover. That moves the ball away from the contact area and gives us space to attack. In some situations, the ball will go backwards on the ground when you strip it. In that case you just need to scramble back and make sure your team keep hold of the ball."

"Shaun Edwards put a big focus on ripping the ball. We would practise one-on-one and you would be ripping up and down. You can't really set these situations up in live games, so we would practise the skill and then in the game it's a case of picking your moment and executing that skill."

WIN QUICK RUCK BALL AND BLOW TEAMS AWAY!

Sean Holley on the weapon powering Leinster and Ireland



LEINSTER'S FIRST trophyless season since 2017 doesn't detract from their breakdown work. Their ball-carrying and ruck speed has blown sides away, most notably Toulouse in the Heineken Champions Cup semi-final.

So impressive is their execution, both in terms of rucks won and efficiency rate, that Andy Farrell has adopted a similar style with Ireland, switching the point of attack with multiple options.

Ireland's average ruck speed in the Six Nations was 2.88 seconds, with 71% of their own ball being 3 seconds or less. That is the sort of speed we associate with the All Blacks, with Aaron Smith moving the ball quickly and waves of runners penetrating the line to create space out wide. With Ireland now well

versed in fast ball, this summer's series between the countries will be gripping.

So why can't other sides play with such pace? It's not just down to the calibre of player. Both Leinster and Ireland are on the same page about what they want to achieve. There is a clear plan and an

insatiable appetite to play this way. It's as if the players realise the effect it has on opponents and relentlessly go about their roles in an enjoyable fashion.

I've examined three areas behind Leinster's quick ruck ball, each example coming from the 40-17 rout of Toulouse...

1

Leinster become more direct closer to the try-line, with support players getting tighter to the ball-carrier. Their carriers offer fewer passes and run hard lines at defenders' inside shoulders. The support players are ready to latch onto the carrier to drive them over the gain- or try-line.

An example against Toulouse is this carry by Michael Ala'alatoa in the build-up to James Lowe's second try. Ala'alatoa runs an out-to-in line but gets enveloped by Emmanuel Meafou (below left). His support players, Dan Sheehan and Andrew Porter, both recognise this and accelerate to latch onto Ala'alatoa, powering him through Meafou's tackle (below right). Two phases later, Lowe scores.

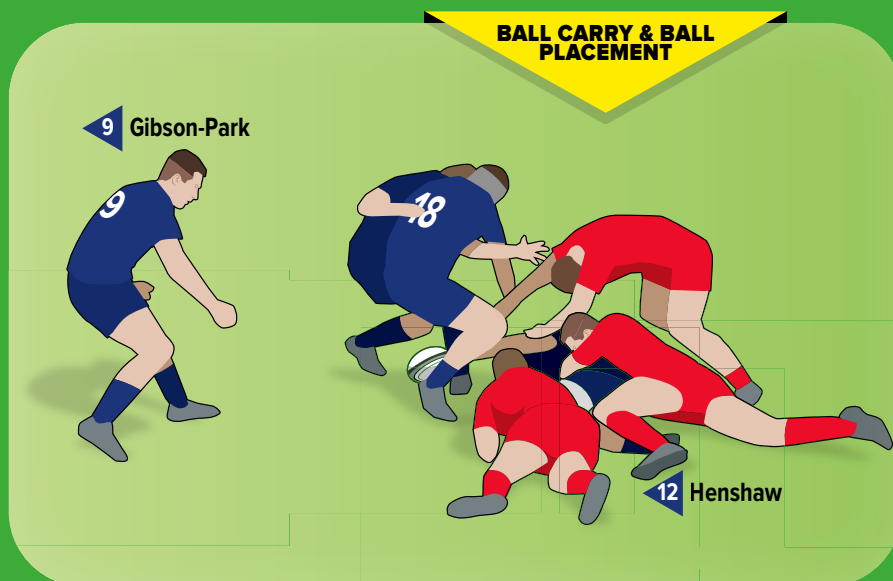
LATCH CLOSE TO THE TRY-LINE



2

It's difficult to obtain quick ruck speed without an initial forward thrust from the ball-carrier. Leinster are blessed with many effective carriers and it's the angles of run and the use of footwork that makes them stand out. It means they get past the point of contact and then their work on the floor ensures the ball is beautifully presented to the No 9.

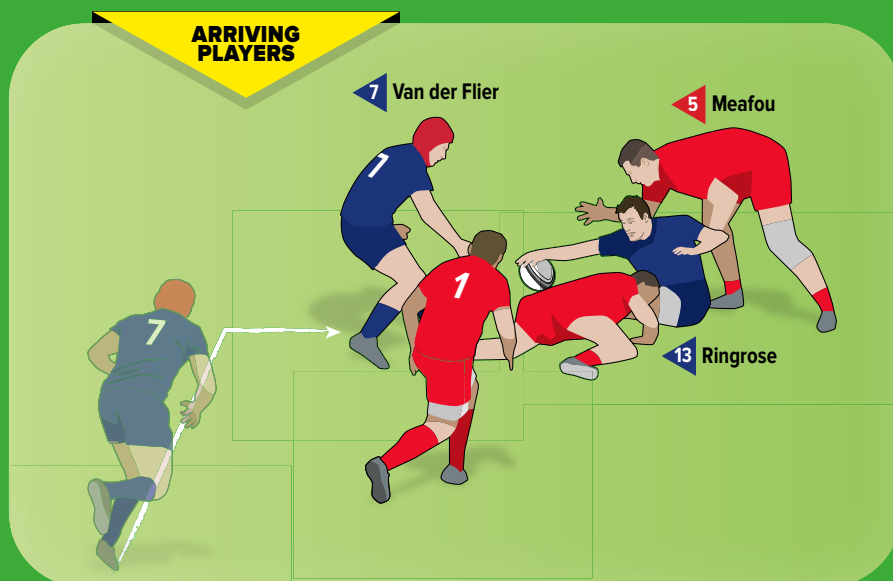
Below, centre Robbie Henshaw has stepped his way back inside before being tackled. He falls parallel to the lines across the field, giving his arriving players a target. He works hard to extend his arms and place the ball as far back towards Jamison Gibson-Park as he can – knowing that his support players will do the rest.



3

Having so many top carriers also means they can beat defenders and sometimes get isolated. Support players have to be alert and track the carriers for the possibility of an offload or to win the race to the clearout, especially as Leinster shift the point of attack so often.

Below, Garry Ringrose has got on the tackler's inside shoulder and across the gain-line. His support has to come from the inside but Josh van der Flier takes a short diagonal line to get to the contact quickly. He then enters the ruck by running an L-shaped run, making him square-on and legal. He engages would-be jackler Emmanuel Meafou and wins the ball, helped by Ringrose presenting the ball long.



THE INSIDE LINE



Sean Holley explains how to speed up your own ruck ball

1 Latch or clean out?

Latching is about decision making. Support players must assess whether to get closer to latch or hold back, assess the threats and lower their height to clean out.

In practice, get defenders to try to hold up the ball-carrier some of the time and perform routine tackles with a jackal threat from the inside on other occasions. Mixing it up this way promotes decision making.

In the former situations, urge the carrier to fight hard with leg drive and lower their height.

2 Work on the floor

Using footwork to create the chance to go beyond the tackle can be replicated in small spaces. Give defenders tackle shields to avoid use of their arms and add one or two tacklers who can tackle only.

Encourage dynamic forward and stepping movements from the ball-carrier with the aim of getting beyond a certain point until tackled; they should drop their height when they know they're going to be tackled.

Once to ground, make players work hard to place the ball. Get defenders to lean on them but not go for the ball, making it difficult to move and place it.

3 Stay within the law

Coaching the law is crucial as conceding possession is demoralising! It's all about winning races and controlling your height and entry into rucks.

Create situations where attackers and defenders race to a tackle, with varying distances and angles of entry into rucks. Use flag poles as entry gates to simulate the width of a ruck and get players to run L-shaped lines close to the ruck, getting their lead leg in line with the gates.

INSIDE THE MIND OF... NICK PHIPPS

Interview **Alan Pearey** // Picture **Getty Images**

The London Irish scrum-half talks seedlings, sausage rolls and Super Bowl

"My favourite cheat meal is anything from **Greggs** (bakery), it's my favourite thing over here. Four sausage rolls for £2, they're giving that away!"

"My old man is responsible for my **nickname**. He teaches in Sydney, I grew up on a school property with my parents. He used to drive around too fast in his car and all the boys called him 'Fang', so I became 'Little Fang' (fanging is Aussie slang for driving at a reckless speed). It's grown into 'Fangsie' over the years."

"I've had to adapt my game. Super Rugby relies on high speed, high tempo, skilful play. Whereas the **Premiership** has more tactical kicking, set-piece, where you play on the field. That's why I came to the Premiership – to develop and learn that style. The difference it's made to my game has been remarkable."

"I wish I'd met **Shane Warne**. He's such a legend. When he died it rocked everyone. Rod Marsh died at the age of 74, which is young. Then Warney the next day died at 52. But as heroes these guys last forever."

"I want to be a **builder** after I stop playing, when I go back to Sydney. Renovate houses. I just need a couple of years' on-site experience to get my full builder's licence. I'm trying to get my head in the industry. I'm lucky I have a bit of direction about where I want to go."

"Kicking is a work-on for me. Not just box kicking and exits but the in-play stuff, moving teams around. I'm working hard on **50:22s** with one of the academy coaches here, James Lightfoot Brown. I'm enjoying that and I can see it progressing."

"Having a ticket for **Super Bowl** would be cool. I don't know anything about the game, it would just be such an entertaining event to see."

"I love **being a dad** and throwing balls all day! Huxley is two and Bayley is one, and we've got another due (early April). I didn't have a lot of cousins or siblings growing up, so I started from the bottom in terms of knowledge and I've just grown into it."

"Paddy Jackson and Rob Simmons have been the standouts for **London Irish** this season, in the backs and forwards. They've been consistently good. And not just because of their playing ability but their leadership as well."

"I'd love to meet **David Attenborough**. He's seen so much of the world. He's one of the most knowledgeable people about pollution and climate change. I'd like to get his no-nonsense take on things."

"The **best present** I've ever had was a vegetable plant set from my wife, Ebony. You use it throughout the year. So if you're meant to put in lettuces in March, they'll send you seedlings to plant in the garden and grow them on. The kids like watching the vegetables grow. The tomatoes have been fun."



WHAT GOES ON TOUR...

[Goes in Rugby World]

A FEW OF the boys went to Twickenham to watch the 2015 World Cup final, but Eben Etzebeth and

I had tickets to watch Liverpool play at Chelsea, *writes Siya Kolisi*.

I'd been a Liverpool fan since I was a kid and this was the first time I'd ever seen them play. The only snag was that our seats were among the Chelsea fans. Whatever you do, we were told, don't celebrate if Liverpool score.

Chelsea went 1-0 up but just before half-time Philippe Coutinho equalised. Instinctively I leapt up and started screaming, just like I did when watching on TV at home. Hundreds of heads whipped round to glare at me: Chelsea fans. Angry. Furious. Hurling abuse at me.

Eben stood up alongside me, all 6ft 8in of him, and folded his arms so his biceps looked even bigger. The abuse faded into mutterings as the fans gradually sat down again. We followed suit and Eben leant over to me. "You do that again and I'll klap you myself."

In the second half, Coutinho scored again before Christian Benteke made it 3-1. I was as good as gold and didn't celebrate, but inside I was cheering my heart out.

On the way out, a few people asked for my autograph. I couldn't believe an English soccer crowd would recognise any Springboks and certainly not me, who had barely featured in the tournament.

Then I heard a passer-by say, "It's definitely him, it's Bony" – they thought I was the Man City player Wilfried Bony. I did the only thing I could: I signed their programmes with the most stylish Wilfried Bony autograph I could muster.

● From Siya Kolisi: *Rise*, published by HarperCollins, RRP £20.

WE WON'T TELL, PROMISE...

We love hearing your stories and want to celebrate the characters of our great game in What Goes On Tour... If you have an amusing tale to tell, drop us a line. Mark your email 'Tour Tale' and send it to rugbyworldletters@futurenet.com



Words Alan Pearey // Pictures Getty Images & JMP/Worcester Warriors

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... LEAD RUGBY'S FIGHT FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Gené Willis is helping to turn Worcester Warriors into Eco Warriors

IS THERE more to a rugby club than rugby? You better believe it. Worcester Warriors might not be winning the Gallagher Premiership any time soon but their moral compass is in overdrive. As the first professional rugby club in Europe to sign up to the United Nations Sports for Climate Action, the Warriors are showing admirable leadership in an area that affects every man jack of us.

The driving force at Sixways is Gené Willis, Head of Stadium Operations and a woman so ardent about climate action that they call her Greta (after Swedish activist Greta Thunberg). When we contacted her, she was presenting on the club's sustainability initiative at a business summit in Manchester.

"I'm very passionate about it so I want to move it forward quickly. Our owners are exceptionally up for it, we've got the buy-in from board level, which is

fantastic," says Willis. "We're a very community-based club and we're trying to do the right thing for our community. We want to make sure that not just as a rugby club but us as a venue we can promote sustainability."

To that end, Worcester have also signed up to Basis (British Association for Sustainable Sport) and a local company, Go Green Experts, who are helping them reduce their carbon footprint. "PRL understand that this is

Pleased as punch

Worcester celebrate a Willi Heinz try against London Irish



something that everybody needs to do, so Basis will be going to all 13 Premiership clubs,” Willis adds.

So what exactly are Worcester doing to help the environment? Where to start. They have LED floodlights and are moving towards motion-sensor LED throughout the stadium, so lights switch off when there’s nobody in the room. They’ve paired up with a company providing electric vehicles, with staff able to buy an electric car on salary sacrifice and charge it at work.

Office printers have swipe-card access to reduce waste paper – the club’s move to an electronic Docusign system saved 239kg of wood before the season even began. Old IT equipment is recycled, non-concussive taps have been installed in the toilets and the club is supporting Rugby Recycled, an initiative run by scrum-half Gareth Simpson to provide used rugby kit and equipment to underprivileged children.

On match days fans use recycled food trays and retail packaging and returnable cups, and can read signage about how Worcester work with energy. Food is one of the club’s ‘six pillars of sustainability’, along with energy, waste, transport, biodiversity and personal responsibility. “They’re areas we can identify certain things to be part of. When we go out to our fans, we can educate them. With regards to food, if we have something plant-based, we’ll have something explaining why it’s plant-based. If we have something that’s locally sourced, we’ll explain why it’s locally sourced.”

All general waste from Sixways is used to generate energy instead of being taken to landfill sites. They hope to make their new kit out of recycled material and to harvest rainwater for watering the pitch.

Worcester work closely with Forest Green Rovers, described as the world’s greenest football club and located less than 50 miles away. Warriors run a six-week education programme in schools promoting sustainability from the perspective of rugby, a project that Rovers might adopt but with a



Driving force
Gené Willis



Bright idea
The LED floodlights were installed in 2019

football slant. “We’re trying to work as closely as we can with them because they lead the way as regards to this. Just because it’s a different sport doesn’t mean we can’t do these things together.”

Perhaps most significant of all, Warriors are drawing up plans for a large solar farm on their land, the timing of which could scarcely be better given the crisis facing energy companies.

Worcester are happy to go out on a limb with all this, to add the Eco to Warriors. Climate change threatens worsening droughts, a catastrophic rise in sea level and a mass extinction of species unless mankind can slow global warming. “With the UN, you sign up to say you will be carbon neutral by 2030 or you will have reduced your carbon emissions by 40% by 2030,” says Willis.

“And that’s quite a daunting task. So it’s making sure you can do that, you’re not signing up to

something you’re not going to be able to achieve. But we (all) need to do this. We need to be ambitious about our targets. We have a platform as sports clubs to shout about this. And people will listen because it is sport.”

As an expert in this field, would Willis be willing to go to other clubs and help them? “Definitely. I would be more than happy to do that. And that was one of the questions that somebody asked me after my presentation. ‘We’re a new club, we’re just starting up, what do we do?’

“My first answer was speak to somebody who’s already on that journey, somebody who’s already started it, because I know what things work and what don’t. I can say to somebody, ‘Be careful when you go along that line.’” One tip is to measure your carbon footprint at the outset so that all subsequent reductions in

emissions are accounted for.

We ask Willis whether the game of rugby is responding quickly enough to the climate crisis.

“I don’t think anybody is responding quickly enough. Not just rugby, I think we all need to respond quickly,” she shoots back. “I think rugby has

realised now that it needs to, I think PRL are picking up on it now. Hopefully it’s not just going to be one of those tick-box exercises. I hope it’s going to be something fulfilling and that we’ll put something together we can all do.” **EW**

DID YOU KNOW?

Worcester won the Event of the Year award at the 2022 Stadium Business Summit for staging a #convertzero match. The Warriors broke new ground for their home game against Saracens by offsetting all emissions from the day at Sixways.



Sprinkle the love
Harvesting rainwater at Sixways is on the cards

“We need to be ambitious about targets. We have a platform as sports clubs to shout about this”

T h e

EVOLU

Words Alan Dymock // Main Picture Chris Hyde/Getty Images



QUESTION of playing STYLE BEFORE

We talk to elite coaches across the game to try to answer one question: Just how do you land on your team's playing identity?

BEFORE WE get into the meat of the subject, Springboks head coach Jacques Nienaber wants to ensure that there is some understanding around what leads up to the killer question. Because deciding how you want to play rugby isn't exactly knocked over before you've blown the froth off your pint.

"If myself, you and the public understand two things first, then it will make a lot of sense what I say next," Nienaber begins. "First, rugby is a game of continuous contest. That's what makes rugby completely different from other contact sports. There are over 800 contests in a game of rugby.

"Then the second one is: rugby is a game for all shapes and sizes. The laws of rugby start with that. It's for the fat kid, the thin kid, the kid that can pass a ball and also the kid who →



Taking to the skies Faf de Klerk enhanced his kicking game significantly after joining the Premiership

→ can't pass the ball. So those are the two things that underpin the sport. Then we get to your question: how long does it take to arrive at a playing style?

"It depends on how well you know the athleticism in your squad. So for example, when I walked into Munster, it takes you some time to see the athletic attributes. We already have a pretty good idea where the contests in rugby are going to be, which is determined by the laws of the game. Then you must make an assessment: what is our squad? What is our players' general skill-set and athleticism? Is it a small team that can move and are agile, or do you have a big team that's heavy, that's not as athletic and not as agile?"

"Then it's the skill-set. When we walked into Munster, we didn't know if we had a team that can pass the ball, we didn't know if we had a team that can get you momentum. How do they get momentum, is it through footwork before contact or is it just with brute force running over a guy? Is it getting momentum by creating chaos because you've got good poachers on the ground? Those are the main things that determine your playing style."

Having led the Springboks to a Rugby World Cup triumph in 2019, working in tandem with Rassie Erasmus, Nienaber has seen the summit of Test rugby. And while we have all endured the near-interminable noise of gums bumping and keyboards clacking about their kicking game, the chaos they create and the press of their defence, one word that has summed up South Africa at their best is 'efficiency'. Many

admirers believe this is borne from an assuredness in the personnel available and honesty about their traits.

According to Nienaber, initially the most sensible approach to developing a

he and boss Fabien Galthié decided to overhaul the team's identity after going to the Japan World Cup with them, and set new standards French athletes would have to meet if they were to fit into a more dynamic set-up. This plan has come to fruition recently, with a Six Nations Grand Slam.

"I think (style) is something that you can change in two years," says Nienaber. "Look at the France side that started 2020 and two years later won the Grand Slam. Myself and Rassie, we came into the Boks for around two years."

"But remember we knew the players. I'd coached Siya (Kolisi) since he got his first professional contract. the same with Eben (Etzebeth), the same with Steven Kitshoff. We coached Malcolm

Marx at Junior Springboks level. And it's the same with Galthié – he knew them."

The benefit of deeper knowledge, Nienaber adds, is that you can talk with more certainty about players' abilities.

"Imagine saying 'We want to play like New Zealand, to play two channels out.' You will discard what you're gifted with Antoine Dupont"

playing style is by catering for the talent you have – at least for most Test teams.

But what about France? As *les Bleus* performance head Thibault Giroud recently explained to *The Ruck* podcast,



Brain Boks South Africa coach Jacques Nienaber

As we discuss how France demand repeated accelerations from players in key areas, the Bok coach says tools like GPS merely underline what you've learnt.

It's why, he adds, France play a lot off nine. When you have "the world's best sniping nine, decision-making nine", it's easier for forwards to run off. As he adds: "Now imagine you tell that nine, 'We want to play like New Zealand, we want to pass the ball, we want to play two channels out.' You will take what you're gifted with Antoine Dupont, you will discard that." The art is pinpointing what you don't need to coach.

What can vary from coach to coach is what you highlight as important. Fellow South African and former Melbourne Rebels coach Dave Wessels recently tweeted: "Ideas in coaching follow trends. A common one at the moment is measuring players' 'effort' – off the ball, getting off the ground, etc. But is this true of some of the best players like (Lionel) Messi or (Duane) Vermeulen, who spend a lot of time walking but burst into life to change the game?"



Push and shove
A Crusaders maul

Listen to enough defence coaches at the elite end and there is repeated chat of dominating the low-skill elements of the game and showing obscene levels of effort. Being willing to torture yourself for the good of the team. As England defence coach Anthony Seibold recently told *Rugby World*: “We reward effort here and working hard for the team. If you’re asking me what our defensive system looks like, then hard work, being aggressive and winning the contact are the key things for me.”

All fair enough. And much of top rugby is chopped up into areas of focus, like defence. ‘Transition’ or group skills can blur a bit but often your style is several Lego bricks stacked. Either way, leaders must decide if your core elements come as diktat or if athletes have a say.

Quins director of rugby Tabai Matson recently said their style is “coach-led, player-driven and performance-focused.

getting worn down by their dictator.

For Test sides, should national identity matter too? Nienaber suggests that traditional playing styles for certain sides exist for a reason. The type of terrain Fijian kids play on impacts style. So too the wider sporting passions of Georgia. School systems influence too, with Nienaber pointing out how many Irish and South African professionals have some form of tertiary education.

Another interesting element is what you can absorb as you go, adding into your arsenal without disrespecting what got you to this point. In elite American Football you hear of plays, trick plays and formations being spotted in the junior college game, and reproduced at the top end. For South Africa, their head coach tells us, the need to monitor players across the globe, plus fewer analysts, means their top coaches see a lot of what is working in the Premiership,

I think in any high-performance programme, you want player input. When they think of the programme and love it, they drive it”.

And we’ve all heard tales of some initially-impressive teams, who had their every footfall scripted, eventually

URC, Japan’s Rugby League One... Even in Major League Rugby in the US.

But where would you begin if you had a completely clean slate and the opportunity to start a top rugby team from scratch? Would you pick and choose from what you have seen through all of these leagues, go real basic or shoot for the moon? It’s a question Susie Appleby faced coming in to start up Exeter Chiefs women.

“My ideology is influenced – as everybody’s is – by things you see other coaches doing,” starts former England half-back Appleby. “You could say a little bit is plagiarised or a lot plagiarised, but as you grow you evolve from being a player into a coach. You remember how you were coached and what bits you liked and what bits you didn’t like, and some of that influences how I coach now.

“But my coaching philosophy is all about finding space. That’s the priority. So how are you going to get the ball in space? The basics of it are: are you going to run there? Are you going to kick it? Are you going to pass it?

“When I moved to Chiefs, I was in a good-slash-bad position of being in the middle of a pandemic. So a lot of my time was spent chatting on Zoom to Haydn Thomas or Ali Hephher (from the Chiefs men’s set-up), who are incredibly experienced coaches. And sharing ideas with them and finding out what they do or what I’ve coached in the →



Instant feedback
England in training



Breaking loose
All Black Sevu Reece
scores v Wales this season

“You need to win enough games to stay employed, but the teams who are continually successful will have a very clear identity”

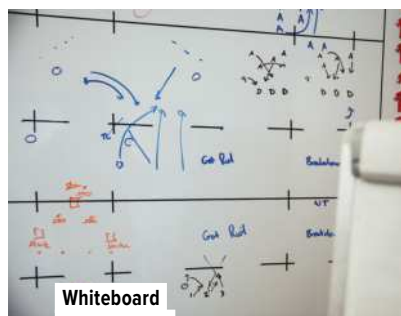
→ past with females. Ali is an amazing coach of attack, so it's about understanding how his ideas evolved. That's what we could do for a year before, try to bring players into the equation that I think would like to play with the vision I had.

“If you watch us play, you might go, ‘Well, that’s quite Exeter Chiefs style in certain areas of the field’. However, we’ve taken bits I’ve seen and thought, ‘Oh, there’s Jack Nowell on the ball, how has he got there?’ And that’s what I’ve chatted to Ali about, about how do you get this proactivity of wingers, getting that many touches on the ball, for example. And that bit works for us. But actually some of the bits that work in the men’s game, they don’t suit us.”

Appleby gives an example of how defences in the men’s Premiership are currently far more advanced than they are in the Premier 15s. That is not to disrespect anyone but merely to highlight where opportunities lie. On the other hand, she explains that Chiefs women also box-kick more than many other women’s sides do, which is far

more in line with Chiefs men. It is something they feel sets them apart.

Again, there is that awareness of who you are – and who you could be. So a team like Exeter women, Appleby says, will model for a few phases and then hopefully the structure is there for players to make decisions based on what’s seen in front of them. She adds: “I would like to think they get to express themselves within that structure. And I don’t ever want them to lose that.”



Whiteboard
Rugby tactics

The other thing Appleby believes her Chiefs outfit benefit from is that they don’t have to go hunting for influences and ideas from around the rugby world – they already have a good array of nationalities in their set-up with players like Spain’s Patricia García, USA’s Kate Zackary, Japan’s Kanako Kobayashi and the Netherlands’ Linde van der Velden.

However, magpieing aside, there’s the consideration of how you get to the perfect end goal. Thumbing our nose at the headline of this piece, you ponder if it’s best to go for the evolution of shifting with the qualities of your players or the revolution of shaping them into your ideal game plan. A head scratcher.

“I think you can try to do both together,” says Ospreys head coach Toby Booth, in his measured fashion. “And that’s the smart way because you still need to win enough games to stay employed. But I think the teams that are continually successful will have a very

Sending it long Melvyn Jaminet's powerful boot is a major asset for European champions France



clear identity. Then you talk about being radical.

"The game is still the game, right? It goes full circle with some things that were unfashionable, what defence coaches work out, with referees or whatever. There's always a cyclical element to it. If I looked at an example, back in 2015 when we (Bath) got to the Premiership final against Saracens, it

was very much something that people had not seen before. And they work it out very quickly, but it was basically rugby league attack versus rugby league defence.

"So I think there is a chance (to be radical) but it's getting harder and harder to see what that is, and it all has to be aligned with your (athlete) capability. And then obviously, the security and the trust that you're given to do that."


It is an interesting notion, one of fashions becoming mainstream. It's put to Booth that Ireland's attack may offer up the pinnacle of the block-on-block attack, where a pass goes in behind a flat runner, and then another pass goes in behind another flat runner. But much like the near-patented Johnny Sexton loop play, where the ten takes the ball back from the man he just passed to on a loop and creates breaks, time and time again, if it ain't broke, why fix it?

As Booth responds: "What you're trying to do is stay in front of the

analysis, really. The evolution of the game means you're trying to innovate and stay in front of the opposition who are trying to stop you being allowed to do that. You talk about how Ireland attack and absolutely, that's rugby league block play all day long."

Having recently spent a stint in South Africa with the Ospreys, the coach is already intrigued by the cultural differences those sides bring to the URC (and soon will in European competition too). He has clocked what he describes as more of "a sevens approach to counter-attack", with more high-risk, high-reward attacks from turnover ball by individuals, before defences are set. It's a use of the athletes available and it's something Booth says he has seen youngsters in their country work at.

Some northern hemisphere coaches might find that a bit uneasy, Booth adds, but it is something different. And it could be a wee step away from what feels at times like stifling scripting.

Whether you want to trust individuals manipulating defences on their own or seek the sanctuary of structure is up to you. But ultimately, you have to know who you are working with. That's what Jacques Nienaber said right at the start. He highlights something else, though, that we should all heed: good coaches must evolve with the team. 

Pics/Getty Images & Daniel Gould

BANG ON TREND

There are a few identifiable style choices you may have noticed this season already

► The **driving maul** is the must-have munition in today's game, with hookers rocketing up try-scoring charts. Kurt Eklund got a hat-trick for the Blues against Moana Pasifika in April. Ex-All Black Justin Marshall labelled such mauls "a horrific thing to watch".

► During the Six Nations, France's numbers showed they are very happy to **play without the ball**. Last in the whole tournament for (average) time spent in possession, and fifth for average carries and average metres made, this is a team who don't mind saying to opponents: "Yours!" They also topped charts for distance kicked.

► Ireland's game at the moment is all about **volume** and **pressure**. In the men's Six Nations they hit the most **rucks** with an average of more than 100 per game. And with 71% of all rucks

under three seconds and superbly accurate, it puts unbelievable stress on opposition. They also had the fewest turnovers conceded and most breaks.

► After 20 rounds in the Gallagher Premiership, Leicester had kicked the ball the most, averaging **34 kicks** and **1,044 metres** a game. The Tigers twinned this with conceding the fewest number of tries and points.

► The new goal-line drop-out law after a hold-up over the try-line has led to a leap in **drop-goals**. Boeta Chamberlain of Sharks got three in one URC game, and Wasps' Dan Robson and Exeter's Stuart Hogg nailed flashy efforts.

Exeter kicking coach Gareth Steenson says: "It's a difficult skill when you get pressure. But with the time you get at full-back, especially from the drop-out law, it's a great weapon."



WORDS SARAH MOCKFORD // MAIN PICTURE JAMES CHEADLE

Red Roses star **Shaunagh Brown** is not only making her views clear

“I’M NOT AN ACTIVIST I’M JUST HONEST”

on rugby’s need to increase diversity and grow the game, but she’s also explaining practical

ways to do exactly that. Meet the person changing the face of the sport...



HAUNAGH BROWN

is pure energy, and that energy comes through the lens. Ask her to pull a variety of expressions for the camera and she reels off a couple of dozen without pause – you can see a few opposite. Suggest a shot that involves her

trying to catch ten balls and she's well up for the challenge, even critiquing a certain writer's throw (and highlighting that she'd like to play with smaller balls). It's all done with a huge smile too; she jokes with the photographer that there's no halfway house when asked to look happy, it's a full-on beam.

Later, when the photo shoot is done but with a Harlequins training session to come, the energy still doesn't dip as Brown sits down for the interview at Surrey Sports Park. It's a full-on attitude with which she approaches most of life.

She starts talking through her tattoos, lifting her shirt to show a book inked on the left-hand side of her torso. The plan is to have pages falling down her left leg illustrating the "story of my life" – the England Commonwealth Games logo for her achievements in athletics' throwing events; a flame for her time as a British Gas engineer; a couple of helmets – one to represent her spell as a commercial diver and one for her career as a firefighter; rugby posts and a ball; something for her nieces and nephews...

After spending the next hour talking to the Harlequins and England prop, you suspect that she might need to extend those pages to her right leg, too, for there is plenty more she is likely to do.

BROWN HAS always had the confidence to try things, never weighed down by the fear of failure. Her mum, Lesley Rickards, recalls her being

given the lead role in a school play aged just four and taking it all in her stride.



Best foot forward Taking on Italy during this year's Six Nations

"She was on stage for about an hour and knew all the words, and she never got stressed," says Rickards.

"That's the thing about her throughout life – she'll always have a go. She never appears to be concerned or stressed. If she's a success, she will do better. If she fails, she'll try again. She's never been frightened to tackle anything and always wanted to try something new. Even now, if she says she will do something, there's no question she'll do it."

That approach has been evident on the rugby pitch, but where there has been a noticeable shift over the past 18 months is how vocal Brown has become about issues like equality, race and diversity.

"During the first lockdown, when the Black Lives Matter protests were happening, I started thinking about who I am, what I stand for," says 31-year-old Brown. "If I looked back at my Instagram for 18 months and took all the rugby pictures away, what would that look like, what is me? At that time, probably not a lot. In my head I knew I stood for a lot, but I wasn't putting it out there."

"Then journalists wanted to speak to me, wanted to hear my story, and that's an honour that they want to hear what

I've got to say. It's about telling my truth, in a respectful way; not shaming people and telling them they're doing wrong, but offering solutions and education.

"You don't sign up to be a role model but if you do yourself proud, stay true to yourself and discover who you are, sometimes you become a role model. At other times sporting success can make you a role model, like Emma Raducanu. You have to embrace it, it's a privilege."

Brown thinks the fact "the colour of my skin is so lightly toned" is why she

hasn't endured much overt racism, but that's not to say she hasn't experienced more subtle microaggressions. There are the assumptions around the position she plays or the differences of travelling with the England rugby team compared to a team of athletes going to the World Junior Championships. "Who gets searched that little bit extra? Who has their bag looked at? In athletics there



People who inspire Shaunagh Brown

LESLEY RICKARDS

"Growing up, it was my mum (above, hugging Brown), just her determination. She was a single working mum but she'd get me out of the house to do things, being active, never holding me back."

EBONY RAINFORD-BRENT

"For what she's done around cricket and growing cricket, which is probably even more middle class than rugby. For all she's doing with the ACE (African-Caribbean Engagement) Programme."

AKALA

"Akala, a musician and academic who also wrote the book *Natives*. He's got one of those voices I can just listen to and listening to him makes me question my thoughts and judgements."

"If you stay true to yourself, sometimes you become a role model. You have to embrace it"

are lots of people who look like me; in rugby there aren't. Why do you assume I'm a prop or a wing? Is it because I'm black? It's about challenging perceptions and thought-provoking conversations, not shouting someone down."

Ask Brown if rugby needs to change and she gives a succinct but definite answer: "Yes." Rather than a radical overhaul, though, she suggests smaller, more easily achievable, changes. Why not add breadth to the music played in stadia or on social media clips, including reggae, Afrobeats and bashment alongside classic pop tunes? How about a larger range of food offerings?

She sends a voicenote the morning after our interview to give an example of how big a difference simple things like this can make. Tom Ilube, the RFU's first black chair, held a welcome dinner with a menu featuring jerk wings and stewed lamb, rice and peas. "It was all done by the in-house chefs at Twickenham – he put the request in and they nailed it."

"There is light at the end of the tunnel with Tom Ilube now in place; he's



England



➔ concentrating on increasing diversity in rugby, not just in players but staffing and volunteers. The growth of rugby has got to come from somewhere, and it's going to come from women and girls, people of different skin colours. I think change will come with Tom as chair."

Brown believes more thought needs to be given to who and where rugby is targeting when it comes to promotion and marketing, whether on social media or direct advertising. "Who is it aimed at?" she says of social media. "What pictures, music, even words are used?"

"Rugby words can be quite exclusive, turnover, try. I went to open a new 4G pitch and a child went over the line, so I'm saying 'score a try', but they didn't know they had to put the ball down. So language is important. The main thing is where we're looking for more players, where we're expanding the game."

This takes Brown to schools and how, particularly in the men's game, rugby cannot increase diversity if it continues to go to the same private schools to source talent. She points to Ugo Monye as an example; his rugby talents were spotted at Lord Wandsworth College and he was regarded as the fastest

person on the sevens circuit when he played, but he has spoken of not even being the fastest person in his year when he was at state school.

"If you're looking in the same places you find the same type of people," says Brown. "The boys' academies go to the same schools and find the same kind of talent. It's not just colour, it's class. I go

"The growth of rugby is going to come from women and girls, from people of different skin colours"

to schools and they don't have a clue what rugby is, but I can get them loving rugby in 45 minutes. But I can't go back every week. Somebody has to grab hold of that and not keep aiming at the same schools if we're to expand the game."

A **S BROWN** rightly points out, it's women's involvement in rugby that is seeing the sport continue to grow, but she also recognises that there is much work to be done. Not just in terms of improving standards off and on the pitch

but female-centred scientific research, more support around pregnancy and work-life balance. Harlequins Women are using the Protecht mouthguards that the men's team have to monitor head impacts and training sessions are tailored around menstrual cycles, so if

a lot of players are on their period they may ease off, but that is the proverbial tip of the iceberg in terms of data.

"There's so much difference between men and women physiologically. Research is done with men and we're told it 'should be' the same with women, but you can't do that. It's important to use women for research because the data is not there; it's not just head injuries but injuries in general, the phase of your menstrual cycle you're most injury prone... It's all the research around that."

"We're getting there slowly but there's still so much work to do around women in sport, not just rugby – and women in work. So many people making decisions at the top of life in general, not just sport, think about them as men. They don't think about what pregnancy looks like or have consideration around dropping kids at school and what time meetings are. Why not have flexible working?"

"It's about having those conversations and hopefully bringing things to people's attention. The more people realise it's not equal, that there are a lot of issues in women's sport and around equality, the better. Things are moving in the right direction, albeit too slowly for my liking!"



Show of power On the attack for Harlequins

FACT FILE

DoB 15 Mar 1990
Born London
Position Prop
Club Harlequins
Height 5ft 7in
Weight 14st 2lb
England debut
 v Canada, 2017
Instagram handle
 @shaunagbrown



Hectic schedule
Brown keeps busy
on and off the pitch

because of other people, because of the messages I get from parents and kids.”

It's that desire to get more people involved in sport that has seen her start a girls' team at Gillingham Anchorians, get involved with Canterbury Hellfire Wheelchair Rugby Club, run sessions for the Girls Rugby Club and more. Rickards says: “Her ambition is to get people into sport and rugby whatever background they are from. If she helps people that's something I'm really proud of her for.

“She's not afraid to speak her mind. I sometimes think, ‘Don't say that’, because social media brings people down as quickly as it puts people up, but she can take it. Shaunagh thinks she's got the right platform now to say things and help people.”

For all her forthrightness, Brown laughs when it's suggested she's an activist. “I don't see myself as an activist, I think of protests and holding signs when I hear that. I just see myself as honest, but respectfully honest.”

Winning smile Holding the Premier 15s trophy



I**N TOP** of all that Brown is doing in promoting the game and raising awareness of social issues, she also has pretty hefty sporting goals of her own. It's only six years since she took up rugby but she was capped by England within two and, following a positional switch from back-row to prop, is now a regular in the Red Roses set-up.

Ask how much she has developed since her 2017 Test debut against Canada and she laughs about understanding the laws now. It's that knowledge that allows her to act quicker on the pitch rather than have to think things through because they were all so new. As for the move to the front row, she says there are two advantages.

“First, everyone needs a prop and there aren't enough people playing there so you can play as long as you want – look at the example of Rocky Clark! Also, and especially in pre-season, in running drills or outright running, the distance is a lot less for props.

“In a game I want to be everywhere. If I don't get 20-plus carries I'm annoyed and I also enjoy the

one-on-one battle of the scrum. But less running in training is the main positive!”

This is a big 12 months for Brown and women's rugby as a whole. At Harlequins, there's the goal of winning back-to-back Allianz Premier 15s titles – she was Player of the Match in the 2021 final. With England, everything is building up to the World Cup in New Zealand next year, starting with this autumn's Tests against the Black Ferns, Canada and the USA. It's more than two years since the Red Roses have faced New Zealand and Brown has never come up against the five-time world champions. She can't wait.

“It's exciting, especially as we've mainly been playing against France (during the pandemic). Playing in the Premier 15s to playing France is a different kettle of fish, it's running into brick walls. Then New Zealand, rather than brick walls it will be brick houses! I'm looking forward to seeing what we do against different opposition.

“Obviously I'm doing a lot of off-pitch stuff and hope to get other people into the game, but my personal goal is playing in a World Cup final.”

As we said at the start, there are plenty more chapters to write in the Shaunagh Brown story. Best keep that right leg on standby for a few pages. **rw**



STEPHEN JONES

Rugby's most outspoken and influential journalist

“You don't need to be local to have a rugby club in your soul”

All hail overseas players! So says Stephen Jones as he points to the benefits of foreign imports and selects his greatest signing...



LET'S START with controversy. I would impose no limit on the number of foreign players in the Gallagher Premiership. And I'd give far more independence and freedom to the Scottish, Irish and Welsh teams in the United Rugby Championship so that they could bring in more overseas talent too.

It's easy to imagine the steam now coming from the ears of national coaches and chief executives. Well, sorry. But I have

never seen club/provincial rugby as some sort of slavish process that is there chiefly to produce players for one national team.

Everybody knows that clubs find it difficult to balance the books, and for many different reasons, so the idea of fielding some exotica of true world class so that the box office does good business is attractive in itself.

And here we are not talking about project players signed by a union and then farmed out to a club. That is totally different and

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



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or [@stephenjones9](https://twitter.com/stephenjones9)

one of the worst ideas rugby has ever had. But at the moment, with restrictions on travel and too many clubs feeling the boring necessity to pack teams full of their own nationality, we've lost some of the appeal of the club competitions.

Perhaps only in France can you catch the exotica in full cry and there clubs now tend to sign players of note but who are past their best. It is all a crying shame.

It's vital that the paymasters at each club grasp what foreign players can do for them. It is →



Charismatic champ
South African Schalk Brits
was a huge hit at Saracens



Crowd pleasers

Jonny Wilkinson and the Toulon squad are hailed by fans after their 2014 double

➔ way more than a matter of coming over to play for a season or two. It's a question of setting or resetting the whole ethos of the club, bringing in outside ideas but, above all, commitment and passion to the cause.

Consider the proud history. The names roll easily off the tongue. If ever you need a description of the attraction of foreign players, here are a few two-word answers – Schalk Brits, Dale McIntosh, Nick Evans, Geordan Murphy, Isa Nacewa, Doug Howlett, Jonny Wilkinson – plus John Afoa, of course (see panel).

That gives you the gist. Admittedly, the sensational Brits is a complete one-off but anyone can aspire to

such greatness. He arrived at Saracens and set out his stall; he became every bit as fervent a Saracen as Englishmen such as Owen Farrell and Maro Itoje.

Not only did he help set the ethics off the field, not only was he a magnificent spokesman for his adopted club, but he was a player almost beyond compare. He had all the talents of a back even though he played up front; he was astonishingly quick and committed; he loved the spotlight and he was very much the leader off the field.

Some years ago, Saracens lost a European match away from home and

they were all sitting moodily in the hotel breakfast room the next day, with no words being exchanged. Brits sprang through the double doors wearing a lurid lime-green tracksuit and bustled his way to the tables. Gradually, players started smiling and then laughing. Brits toured the tables exuding positivity and, suddenly, it was as if Saracens had won the tournament. He kept that level of intensity going until the end.

McIntosh, arriving as a highly-rated back-row man at the Pontypridd club, is

You surely want youngsters to be excited by signings and want to see the greats in the flesh

another who came to symbolise the club as much as any Welshman.

Murphy made one of the shorter journeys, from Ireland to Leicester. Possibly he left the club on a low after an unsuccessful coaching spell but it's important to remember the statistics alone that this great foreign player achieved. He scored 691 points for Leicester, including 93 tries – incredible from full-back. He was part of eight Premiership-winning teams and lifted two Heineken Cups, and stayed with the club after Ireland pushed through one of those myopic regulations that meant

that he could not play for his country if he remained at Welford Road.

And the Tigers can pick them. The great powerhouse prop Marcos Ayerza played 246 times for Leicester at loosehead. He played in four Premiership-winning teams. And, as I said earlier, it's not just the playing prowess. How many young Leicester forwards did Ayerza inspire by his relentless power and professionalism?

It is also true that around the time of their successes in the Heineken Cup,

the inspirational Leicester player was Australian Pat Howard, magnificent on and off the field.

In Scotland, Todd Blackadder was a

wonderful capture for Edinburgh, so too DTH van der Merwe. The maverick Nikola Matawalu, the Fijian scrum-half, may not have been the most predictable player at Glasgow but he was box-office personified; he pulled off extraordinary plays and showed such vision. You can imagine youngsters congregating whenever he was down to play.

The list is almost endless. Sébastien Chabal was the talisman for Sale in their great days, when the Sharks drew capacity crowds; Michael Lynagh, Francois Pienaar and Philippe Sella were amongst the earliest signings by



Nigel Wray at Saracens. Fly-half Evans became one of the greatest players in Harlequins' history and remains at the club as a coach. Howlett for Munster and Nacewa for Leinster were among the most judicious signings.

Dean Mumm, of Australia, inserted himself into the fraternity at Exeter and made an enormous difference. Bruce Reihana became beloved at Northampton after joining in 2002 and there is no man more revered, still, in Welsh rugby than the Canadian prop Rod Snow, from Newfoundland. The great Snow will always be a member of Newport's Hall of Fame.

And when you start talking Samoans, then you are again reminded of what the incomers can achieve. Think back to Junior Paramore at Bedford, Pat Lam at Newcastle and Northampton, where he won the Premiership and the Heineken Cup respectively, Dan Leo at Wasps, and so many others.

Occasionally, foreign players have not measured up. Chris Jack was seen as one of the best locks in the world when he came from New Zealand to join the Premiership but he never showed himself at his best form for Saracens. Mark Andrews, the Springbok, had a rather dowdy spell at Newcastle, a period in which, by all accounts, he did not ingratiate himself with the hierarchy.

Is it significant that so few current All Blacks have ever chanced their arm in the Premiership or, indeed, anywhere in European rugby? Marty Holah was outstandingly consistent for the Ospreys but so many more All Blacks have tended to opt for the soft life in Japan, with its high wages and relatively comfortable style of rugby. Some of the hardest men in rugby, allegedly, could

never bring themselves to try out in the graft and grunt of the Premiership.

National coaches often complain that they're trying to assess players in certain positions only to find those positions filled by foreigners at club level. But are they saying young Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotsmen or Welshmen deserve an easy passage into the club jersey?

I can recall when Tim Rodber was rising through the ranks at Northampton. Also there at the time in his position was the great Buck Shelford. Shelford set a stirring example; after he had reached the heights, Rodber explained the debt he owed to the charging Buck. The best foreign players are inspiring their club mates, to such an extent that they could well be making things hard in the future for their own native country's team.

Wilkinson, we must remember, had lost form when he signed for Toulon. But the influence he wielded, the awe in which he was held, helped them to three Heineken Cups and his stature on retirement was little less than god-like.

And at its basic level, the signing of really outstanding players in their prime changes the stakes. Some of the teams both in the Premiership and the URC look a little grey these days, a little lacking in colour. You would surely want

youngsters and their parents, whether they are aspiring players or simply fans, to be excited by signings and to ask their parents to take them down to see in the flesh the greats they have only witnessed at World Cups.

The vast majority of foreign signings have left European rugby in a better state, driven the turnstiles and driven the team. Club and provincial rugby needs to go more global. When you win the cup at the end of the season, you might understand that the home countries are by no means the sole repository of glory and inspiration.

With reference to the English scene, the 'marquee player' rule allows the more moneyed clubs to bring in the greatest names in the sport, albeit that from next season only one star's salary will be excluded from the cap.

This has been a time of privation, but you sense that club rugby across the home nations could enter some boom years when the effects of the pandemic wear off and (please God) there is a proper structured season.

Then there will be no excuse. Homespun youngsters are all very well. But world-class magic is something else entirely. And to have a rugby club in your soul, you don't need to be local. **RW**

AND THE GREATEST FOREIGN SIGNING IS... JOHN AFOA

The greatest foreign signing anyone in European rugby ever made? That record is held jointly by Ulster, Gloucester and Bristol thanks to the contracts they gave to John Afoa.

The Hercules prop is now 38. He is still on the playing books (and scrum coaching) at Bristol Bears, even though it's ten years since he won the last of his 36 All Blacks caps at RWC 2011. Before that he played 100 times for the Blues.

He helped a major revival with Ulster, did the same at Gloucester (right) and then moved to Bristol, where he has been in the form of his career despite having passed his mid-30s.

Afoa is still so passionate about his rugby that you see

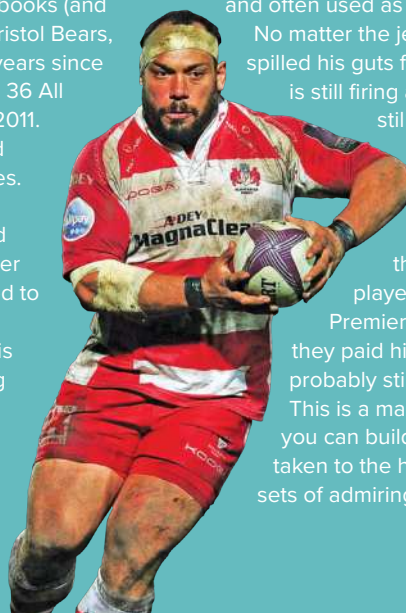
him punching the air as he takes the field. He is as good up front as ever but he has also added golden extras – pop passing, dummying, running with the ball, running off the ball. He's crowd-pleasing, indomitable and often used as first receiver.

No matter the jersey, he has spilled his guts for it. The engine is still firing and the heart is still pounding.

At one stage when with Gloucester he was said to be the highest-paid player in the

Premiership. Whatever they paid him, it was probably still not enough.

This is a man around whom you can build a team; a Kiwi taken to the hearts of three sets of admiring fans.



DOWNTIME WITH... MONTY IOANE

“On the weekend I grazed Elvis and got him patched up”

The Benetton and Italy wing on tattoos, travel troubles and topless guitar

Interview **Alan Dymock** // Pictures **Getty Images & Inpho**

D **O YOU have any nicknames?** Monty is actually my nickname. My full name is Montanna. My dad was a big fan of the quarterback Joe Montana back in the day. He's much more of a rugby fan but I guess the name stuck with him.

Are you an NFL fan? Not really. I like watching the running backs and the way they attack, but I don't know the rules or anything. I used to do a bit of track and field but never really stuck to that. I played a bit of what we would call soccer. I played a bit of Aussie Rules, too, but my kicking wasn't so good! So I wouldn't say I'm that sporty a person.

Funniest team-mate? Iliesa Ratuva. He's like a 12-year-old boy in a 30-year-old body. That's one guy who never takes life too seriously. Even in a bad week. He's that character every team needs.

What can you tell us about your tattoos? Well, some of them are just gap-fillers, that I designed myself and that I really like. On my stomach is a really big one based around my religion.

On my left leg I've got two pictures of my daughters' faces, as well as an image of them in front of Milan Cathedral. And then on my right leg I've got loads of portraits of a bunch of artists and celebrities that I really like. For example, I've got one of Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Elvis, Michael Jackson and Bruce Lee. Things like that.

Do you ever worry about them on artificial surfaces? It's funny you say that! On the weekend I grazed a bit of Elvis and got him covered

up and patched up. I'll have to see how it heals up and whether it has faded.

Got any phobias? Definitely spiders, because I'm from Australia and they're massive. I hate heights. And I also hate being alone in the house! I have to sleep with some sort of light on so I can see what's going on because I'm always thinking that something is out

there to get me!

What really bugs you?

People who eat with their mouth open. And people who touch my hair.

Do you have any guilty pleasures? I'm a huge chocolate man and I reckon I eat at least a block a day. That's not a lie. It's pretty bad! Cadbury hazelnut is my go-to. Even the boys say I've got a bad addiction! I had a

FACT FILE

DoB 30 Oct 1994
Born Melbourne, Aus
Position Wing
Club Benetton
Height 5ft 11in
Weight 14st 13lb
Instagram handle
[@montyioane](#)

WHAT'S ON YOUR PHONE?



Last person you phoned
 Toa Halafihi, our No 8



Most important person in phone
 My partner, Melissa



Last person you texted
 My partner again!



Last photo you took
 Me modelling some clothes!



Favourite social network
 Facebook, because I like watching videos on there



Plenty to ink about
loane with his shirt off



Dinner guest?
Billionaire Elon Musk

problem when we were away for the November Tests; I stocked up on chocolate before I went – and I don't mind sharing things – but every day my room-mate would ask for some.
If your house was on fire and everyone was safe, what would you rescue? My passport. I'm actually on my last warning for my passport in Australia. I lost one and within the space of a year I lost my emergency passport. They said if I lose

“I lost my passport and within a year lost my emergency passport. I’m on a last warning in Australia”

a third one they most likely won't give me another one. Because I'm eligible for a Fijian and Samoan passport, and they started to question me about the whole black market side. So I can't afford to lose another one!
Would you want to become an Italian citizen? If I can, I 100% would. I've got another six years to go in Italy before I can try. But if I stay and get the opportunity, without doubt I'd take it.
If you could be any of your team-mates who would you be? It has to be Ratuva.

As a character he is absolutely amazing. Like, is there not a sad day in his life? I can't say I've ever seen him sad and I want to know what goes on in his head.
Biggest waste of money? I'm not sure if you've ever heard of those pyramid schemes? Well, when I was very young I did invest in the same company two times. I thought I'd give it a go and both times nothing came out of it. You hear about easy money... Yeah, there's definitely a life lesson in there!
Who would be your three dream dinner party guests? I've been asked this question before and I'd say: my father, Paul. Then the richest man in the world and the poorest man in the world! As for what we'd eat, how about some pizza?
Any hidden talents? I do love to play the guitar and sing a little bit. A couple of Italy's islander boys will too.
What's your crowd-pleaser with that? I would take my shirt off!
What would you like to achieve outside of rugby? A big question. Probably just to provide a future for my family.



Favourite
music app
Spotify



Last app
downloaded
The Apple Store
app update



Last song
you played
Sacrifice by
Elton John



Favourite
WhatsApp group
I can't tell you
the name but
one with the
Benetton boys

Are deliberate knock-ons treated too harshly?

CHRISTY DORAN **ALAN PEAREY**

WE CALL players freaks of nature regularly. From Rieko loane to Cheslin Kolbe, Louis Rees-Zammit to Damian Penaud, grounding the ball is a modern art form. But when it comes to intercepts, no, no, catching the ball with one hand is suddenly a leap too far.

"Not in a realistic position to catch the ball," cry referees from all corners of the world. "Your hands were pointed down," others say. Who are the referees to tell some of the best athletes in the world what someone can and cannot do?

Watch any highlight reel from the past decade and it's jaw-dropping.

Deliberate knockdowns came to a head last autumn during Wales' great escape against the Wallabies. Kurtley Beale paid the price for putting an egg in each basket by stretching his arms wide, second-guessing the Welsh attack. For average Joes, it looked like a tackler attempting to wrap. Nick Tompkins stopped and started again as everyone else thought they witnessed a clear knockdown. But the ball had bounced backwards, according to Mike Adamson.

The deliberate knockdown can't be a law because it's not black and white, it's riddled with grey in a game already confusing. Rugby encourages players of all shapes and sizes and works like chess. But if there is one law it should borrow from league, it's that there is no such consequence for a knock-on. It's either a knock-on or play on. Replicating league would cut out the grey and the subjectiveness of one strange law.

Fox Sports
Australia rugby
correspondent

Rugby World
writer and
sub-editor

JEOPARDY IN sport is good. It's part of the thrill. There's nothing wrong with a defender trying to intercept a pass but if you get it wrong don't expect sympathy. Like goal-line breakdown steals, it's high risk, high reward and be prepared to pay the consequences for a misjudgment.

If you make a genuine attempt to catch the ball and knock on, it's a scrum to the opposition. Fine. But as we know, players often make little or no effort to catch it. They merely want to stop the move.

To take a recent example, Montpellier's Pierre Lucas halted a glorious Leinster

attack by slapping the ball down near the try-line. What a killjoy! Wayne Barnes played advantage and Leinster scored, but he should have binned Lucas anyway. Negative actions like that should be punished.

The main device for ascertaining if a knock-on is deliberate is whether a defender's hands are facing up or down. It's not perfect but so what. The game isn't perfect, nor are referees.

Rugby should favour attack and frame laws to curb cynicism. Like when

a defender, close to the passer, tries to disguise a deliberate knock-on as an accidental byproduct of a wrap tackle. Crafty. And illegal – off you go for ten!

We want flowing rugby and tries, not knock-ons and slap-downs. A successful intercept? Great. Often that sparks an exciting foot race. But like putting your chips on red at the roulette wheel and seeing it land on black, don't go bleating if your boldness backfires.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send your views to
rugbyworldletters
@futurenet.com

HOW TO MASTER THE CROSS-FIELD KICK

Bath fly-half **Orlando Bailey** gives his top tips on this skill

"When I decide to kick a cross-field, I'm first of all scanning to see where the deep defenders are. I'm also listening to feedback from other players. One of the best times to kick is after we've made a break. You've manipulated the deep defenders and they might have just one man back to cover a kick."

"It is high risk. But it's a case of practising the skill and getting that input from your other players that it is a good option. Then it's just being brave with it. It's always better to have a go and play to the space when it is there rather than thinking afterwards, 'If only, if only I had been brave!'"

"I'll try to square my hips, so they face the target. You want to be looking for a low punchy kick, like a kick-pass. I'll let the ball drop a little lower to the ground before I hit it. We always want our wingers to be the option. We do analysis throughout the week to see how the opposition defend, but if you don't have that option you can spot how the deep defenders operate during the game."

"I used to practise a lot of different kicks when I was a kid in the garden. I would try to kick off the side of my foot and chip over the top of the defence. If you're adaptable and have those different tools in your locker, you will be more effective."

WHY ANDRE THE GIANT IS TEARING UP TREES

The South African centre has been phenomenal for Harlequins, says Sean Holley



ANDRE ESTERHUIZEN can certainly do the hard yards in the inside-centre channel, his big frame and deceptive pace making him a difficult man to bring down. But he is much more than just a crash-ball centre and Harlequins are reaping the benefits of his skill-set.

'Andre the Giant' is a useful left-footed kicker with huge distance – something that has probably been underutilised. He's an unbelievable offloader, with the confidence gained by his 6ft 4in, 113kg frame enabling him to break tackles.

This size gives him an advantage over the ball in defence, making him hard to remove, and he has developed a turnover threat in defence. Quins have also worked on his distribution skills so that he can cover at outside-half.

Quins look after their own and their desire to get Esterhuizen, 28, back in a Springbok jersey was fulfilled when he won his ninth cap in the 2022 summer series against Wales. He is similar in stature and style to Damian de Allende

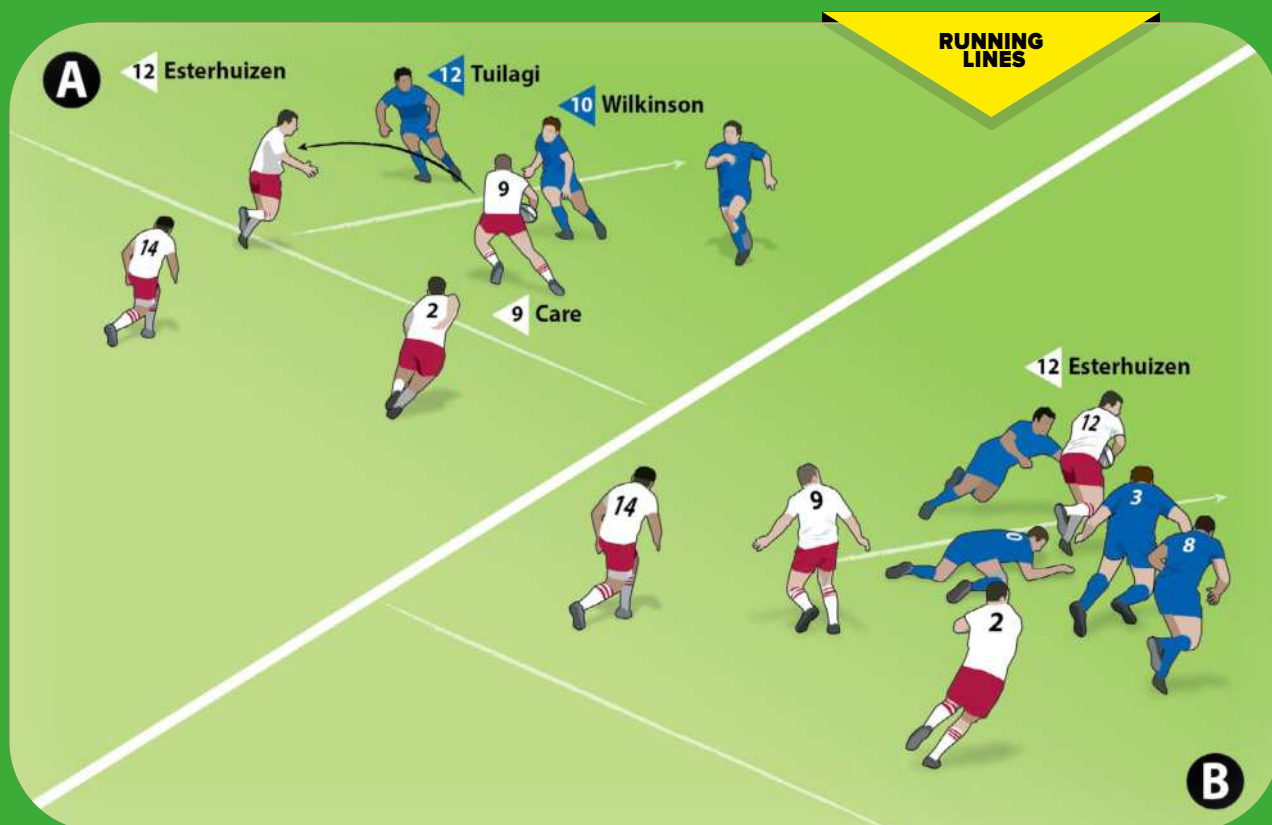
and it remains to be seen if South Africa coach Jacques Nienaber will pick the two together going forward.

I've taken a look at three areas that make Esterhuizen one of the best players in the Gallagher Premiership...

1

Esterhuizen thrives on attacking weak inside-shoulder tackles, running 'against the grain' – back towards traffic – and bouncing off defenders. It has allowed Harlequins to launch off set-piece, getting across the gain-line and quickly into their attacking shape.

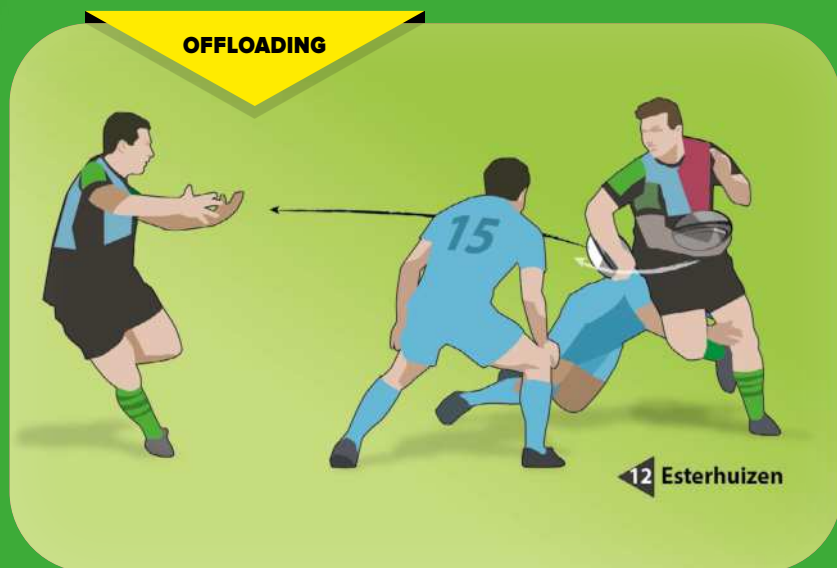
Using Esterhuizen directly off first phase also protects fly-half Marcus Smith, allowing him to get into position for the next phase. However, Esterhuizen breaks through and creates on that first phase so often that Quins players now react to his running to sniff a potential pass or offload and support him with a greater level of expectation. In the example below against Sale, Esterhuizen takes Danny Care's flat pass near the line and crashes through the ten-12 channel.



2

I've often written about offloading in *The Analyst* – and rarely have I seen a better offloader than Esterhuizen. The pace at which he takes the ball allows him to burst through tackles and win collisions so well that his offloading becomes easier. He also has a wide range of offloading skills up his sleeve. He can pass off the floor or deliver a subtle lift in the air through contact. But his trademark is the one-handed reverse offload (below), almost like a father, playing in the park with his kids, carrying the ball one-handed. Such is the ease with which Esterhuizen executes these skills.

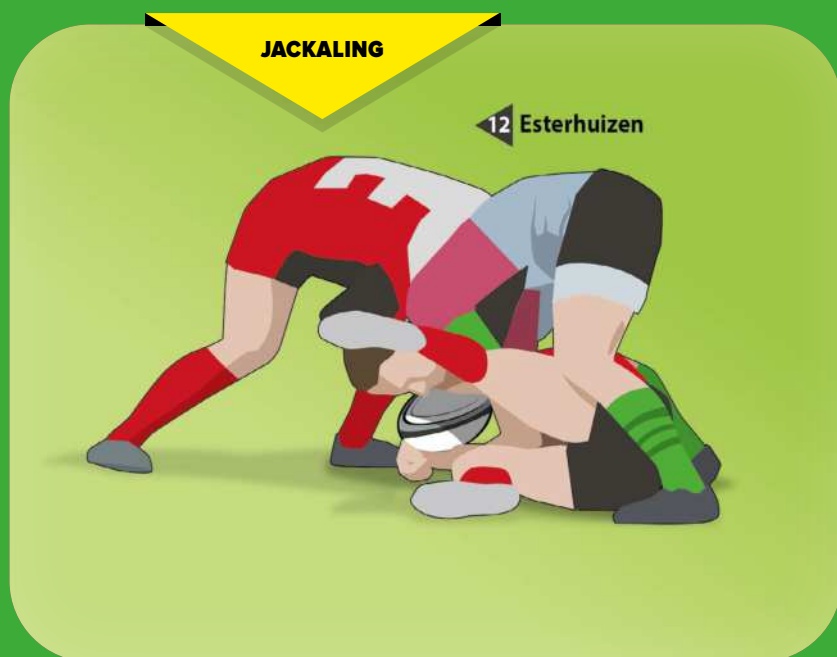
OFFLOADING



3

If your principal carrier also has the ability to win you ball, you have a truly gold-plated player! Esterhuizen's frame and physicality enables him to make turnovers over the ball in defence and that is an art – wide base, strong core, target the ball, ride the clearout – that all coaches cherish. But it's the timing and selection of when and how to do it that makes the difference. The key to his jackal technique is his ability to arrive at the tackle from the direction of his goal-line, as the law requires. Often a centre's turnover attempts come when they're retreating, so this law is crucial to them.

JACKALING



THE INSIDE LINE



Coach these skills with your players, says Sean Holley

1 Get your timing right

Esterhuizen hits full speed as he takes the ball. He alters his lines of run late, using a step or arcing run to get where he needs to be at the right time. To do this, take the timing of your run off the player passing to you – so many youngsters ball watch and get in front of the passer.

When coaching, set up a range of ball deliveries off set-piece to hone the timing between passer and centre. Set up corridors for the player to pick channels to run into. I used big tackle tubes, progressing to players standing behind tubes who then appear into different channels to force the carrier to change direction.

2 The ball is your friend

Ball familiarity is key to the offload: being comfortable with a ball in two hands, either hand, juggling and then when off-balance staying in control. Falling, landing and body control are all aspects to work on. Use crash mats to build confidence.

Get a carrier to tackle a tackle tube one-handed whilst moving the ball to the other hand so they can offload to a support player behind. Develop with an actual tackle. One v ones in small grids can generate quick offloads.

3 Move the target

There is a lot of detail to the tackle and ruck laws, so bring a referee to training to go through the do's and don'ts.

Practise the jackal technique safely and in isolation, but I find moving the target, and getting players to retreat/move to the side before targeting a turnover, makes it more realistic. It makes it more dynamic and instinctive.

Make it a race and stop to break down each situation; ask questions about decisions/laws. Repeat and do under duress.

INSIDE THE MIND OF... HANGO GERMISHUYS

Interview Sarah Mockford // Picture Getty Images

The USA flanker talks culture shocks, the great outdoors and the World Cup

"Beating Uruguay (this month) is our priority. We want to claim a seat at the **World Cup** as Americas One, so that is our biggest priority."

"I started playing rugby in **South Africa**. I'd watched my dad play and I started when I was six. I grew up with the sport. I told my dad I was only moving to the USA if he could find me a rugby team! I ended up going to Westside High School, which has a team, and there are seven or eight clubs in Nebraska."

"When you jog onto a rugby field you don't expect to score a **hat-trick**, so to do that and beat Canada in a World Cup play-off was amazing. The support was incredible. Going into that game knowing we were 13 points down was a sucky feeling, so getting the win was great."

"I'm a country person so moving to **New York** to play for Rugby United NY was a shock at first. I'd never seen anything like it. I'm loving it now; it's a great experience. But I couldn't live in the city full-time."

"I spent six or seven months in the **Gloucester Academy**. I played for the All-Americans at a Wellington schools tournament and someone got in touch with my coach. I did a trial at Gloucester and then came to play with the academy. I learnt a lot and played with Sam Underhill."

"There have definitely been improvements with the **MLR**. The games have got tougher as everyone has coaching from overseas and top professional players coming in. That helps the USA national team, and the Canada team, to be better."

"My favourite food is **biltong**, South African beef jerky! Me and my dad make it two or three times a year."

"I love everything **outdoors** – hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, boating... When I have time off from rugby, I come back to Nebraska and do anything outdoors."

"If I could meet anyone alive or dead... My **grandpa** on my dad's side. He was a big influence, one of the most hard-working men I've met. He passed away when I was 16."

"I was 14 when I moved to **America**. It was a big culture change. At school in South Africa we wore uniforms, had strict rules; there were no uniforms here, classes were different. My dad's brother moved to Nebraska and Dad came to visit and liked it so moved too. They have a roofing company."

"The best **vacation** I've been on would have to be last year when I went to Cabo for a week for Christmas, because that's how I met my girlfriend. She lives in Canada so it was difficult to see each other at first with Covid, but it's better now."



WHAT GOES ON TOUR...

[Goes in Rugby World]

EARLIER IN the year, on BBC 5 Live's *Six Nations Greatest* podcast, Sam Warburton discussed how one of Warren Gatland's big strengths was managing team environments. As an example, he cited this reaction to Wales' 2015 Six Nations defeat by England...

"We went in on the Monday and when you lose those games, you come back into camp and it's really down. Rather than have a meeting where he tore into us and everything we did wrong, I remember we had breakfast, then Gats was like, 'There's no meeting at 9.30am or whatever, just be at the gym for 10 o'clock.'

"We thought we might be getting punished, we weren't sure. So we go up to the gym and we just heard this thumping music blaring out. We go in, the whole team, and the music stops. There are disco balls, lights, DJ decks with an actual DJ in there!

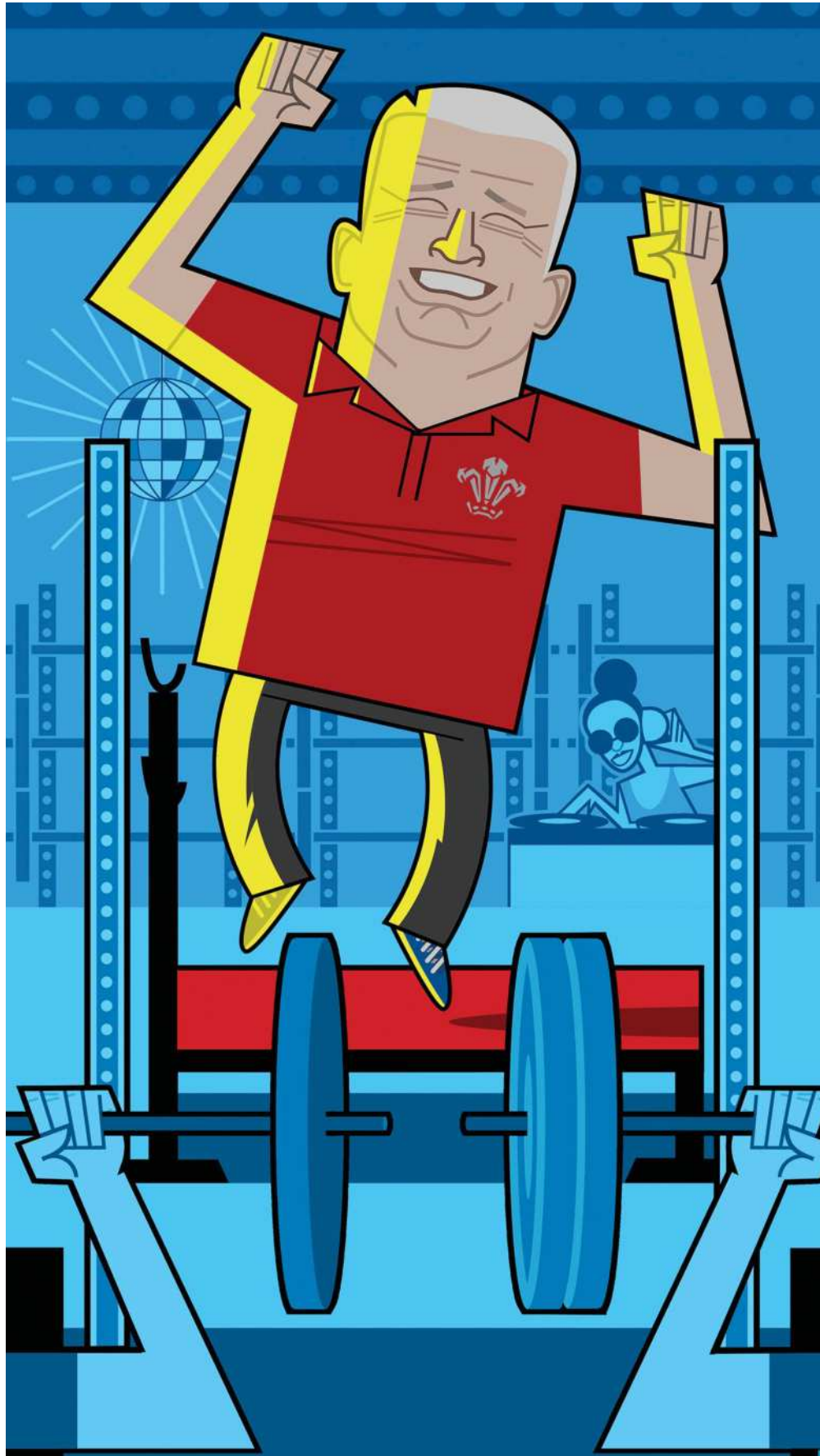
"Gats goes, 'Boys, we've lost the game but we're going to have a little bit of a pick-me-up day. We've got a DJ in, it's going to be vests or top off only, and we're going to have a really good pump session!'

"So we had this gym session, you couldn't speak to each other because the music was pumping that bad. We had a girl on the DJ decks doing a really good job. The boys were loving it. And Gats was just stood on the weights bench punching the air for five minutes as if he was in a club!

"Suddenly we went from losing to England, and what we thought was going to be the worst training week of the year, to a hilarious session. We all go back bouncing for lunch. 'Right, let's go again!'" **FW**

WE WON'T TELL, PROMISE...

We love hearing your stories and want to celebrate the characters of our great game in What Goes On Tour... If you have an amusing tale to tell, drop us a line. Mark your email 'Tour Tale' and send it to rugbyworldletters@futurenet.com



Words Sarah Mockford // Pictures Getty Images & Inpho

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO... BE RUGBY'S MOST DECORATED PLAYER

New Zealand's Kelly Brazier has a trophy haul to envy

TWO 15S World Cups, two Sevens World Cups, Commonwealth Games gold and Olympic gold (and silver). It's a mightily impressive medal haul for Kelly Brazier, and that's before you throw in the six World Sevens Series titles.

There are men's players who have two World Cups – South Africa's Frans Steyn was the latest player to achieve the feat in 2019 – while Anna Richards triumphed

an incredible four times in the women's 15s showpiece. Others have won a combination of medals, like Lawrence Dallaglio and Matt Dawson, who were part of England's triumphs at the Sevens World Cup in 1993 and the 15s event in 2003. Yet no one can match Brazier's overall tally across the two codes. So how does it feel to be described as rugby's most decorated player?

"It's unreal even hearing those words," says the 32-year-old New Zealander.

"I've just been lucky to be surrounded by world-class athletes, great coaches, and been able to fill my role in great teams."

She's playing down her own talents somewhat there. She was just 20 when she kicked eight points in the Black Ferns' 13-10 win over England in the 2010 World Cup final and was key to New Zealand's victory over the same opponents seven years later, while she scored the winning try in extra-time in the 2018 Commonwealth Games final.



Golden rule
Brazier enjoys NZ's
Olympics triumph in Tokyo

For more than a decade, she has been a mainstay in her country's sevens and 15s squads, switching between the two seamlessly. She's known for her fitness and footwork (honed when playing with her older brother and his friends – "I learnt to go around people rather than through them as they were bigger than me"), but it's her game understanding that really stands out, her rugby smarts.

Brazier herself points to her work ethic and her desire to improve as crucial to her longevity. "The women's game has changed so much, the skill level is crazy, so I've had to (keep improving). I'd never be able to keep up if not; with the talent in New Zealand, I'd just be pushed out straightaway. So every year I go away and work on my weaknesses, work on my strengths and keep pushing. I have that drive and edge to want to keep getting better and that's what has helped me stick around.

"I'm very competitive and I'm most competitive with myself. During lockdown in New Zealand I went crazy with running; I'd try to beat my time every day! It's that competitiveness with myself to push hard, get better, do more."

A lot of the medals she has accumulated over the years are at her mum's house in Dunedin, but she has the more recent ones at the home she shares with wife Tahlia and son Oakley in Papamoa, near the sevens base in Tauranga. Tahlia jokingly describes the cabinet in which they are stored along with lots of Black Ferns photos as 'Kelly's Shrine'.

So what are Brazier's standout moments? "I was pretty young at the 2010 World Cup and getting to play beside Anna Richards, who I'd grown up watching, I was in awe. In more recent times, gold with the sevens team at the Olympics after the disappointment of silver in Rio, which is what fuelled everyone going to Tokyo. A lot of work went in over those five years; we didn't forget that moment (losing the 2016 final) until we'd got that gold medal.

"It's like a journey and you definitely remember the people



RWC 2017...
With Carla Hohepa



RWC 2010...
Facing England in the final

and the things we've done as a team rather than the medals."

When it comes to discussing the biggest influences on her career, she points to two of her first coaches. Brent Lucas coached her in Dunedin from the age of five to 13 and she says: "Even though I was the only girl in the whole competition, he treated me no differently and that gave me the confidence to keep turning up and wanting to play."

Then there was her first Otago coach John Kyle, who picked her aged just 14. "I remember vividly him coming to a

meeting with my parents because I'd be missing school and travelling away with a women's team for the weekend. Those people believing in me, backing me, built confidence in me."

DID YOU KNOW?

There are three major women's rugby events in 2022 – the Commonwealth Games, the Sevens World Cup and the 15s World Cup. Kelly Brazier is aiming to be involved in all three.

"That's the plan," she says. "I love playing and if the timings work out I'll be the first to put my hand up."

In fact, Brazier is hoping to make it all the way to the 2024 Olympics before moving into coaching.

She also namechecks then Otago team-mates Carla Hohepa and Kathleen Wilton for guiding her through her first Black Ferns camps. Now Brazier, along with Hohepa, who is also still part of the NZ set-up, is a mentor to the newer members of the Black Ferns squad – there were a dozen debutants on their recent tour of England and France.

"I forget that I'm old! Anyone over 30 is called 'muttons' and the young ones are 'lambs'. I've been around for a while and I've got a bit of experience. I think about when I was new to the team, then go around to our young players, sharing stories and experiences, little things that helped me. There's some pretty exciting talent and it's good to help guide them."

The Black Ferns were playing their first Tests for more than two years, but would have hoped for far better than two record defeats by the Red Roses (and two losses to France). Still, Brazier believes

things will be very different come a World Cup on home soil next year. "There are a lot of new faces in the team and it's pretty cool to have exposed them to international rugby. That's huge heading into next year. This team has been successful for a number of years and you can't judge a team on two Tests. A lot



Decisive moment
En route to the winning try in the 2018 Commonwealth Games

of things can change between now and then. We've got the right coaching group, very talented players and a lot of work to do in the next 11 months."

Don't bet against Brazier adding more medals to her haul. **rw**

"I have that drive and edge to want to keep getting better. That's what has helped me stick around"

“THE WALLS WERE CAVING IN”

With a century of Test caps, a history of honest graft and a willingness to discuss the biggest mistake of his life, **James Slipper** is a valuable role model for this young Wallabies side



THE LOOSEHEAD reflects on it now as fuel for an incredible career revival, but there's no avoiding the unravelling that occurred in 2018 when Wallaby James Slipper was stood down from rugby after testing positive for cocaine.

"It was a period of my life, mate, that I am going to have to live with now," he begins. When the then-Reds prop was handed a two-month ban, he revealed via social media that he'd been suffering with depression for a year. He had a ragged history with injury and had also received gut-punch news of serious illness in his family. He knows that he did wrong, but also wants to be open.

"I really struggled. It was a really tough time, not just for me but my family as well. One thing I

can say is I learnt a lot from that →



Australia

➔ and truly believe I'm a better person for going through such a hard period.

"If I reflect on it now, I try to look at it as a positive. At the time the walls were caving in and there was a period where I wanted to give the game away, but I just stuck to myself and got through it.

"I had a lot of family around me and my close mates, who helped me get through that time. And I look back at that period of my life like a springboard into the back-end of my career where I feel I'm playing good rugby. I'm really enjoying my rugby and whenever I do I play the best footie. But it's a part of my career I won't shy away from.

"And probably the biggest thing I enjoy now in my career is being around the young players. There's nothing better than giving advice to a younger player who has asked for advice. Whether on the field or off the field, it doesn't really bother me, I just get a kick out of the fact a young player wants to be better.



Rite of passage
On debut v England



PICS Getty Images

Brumby at large
Against the Rebels

"I feel like for Australian rugby, we need more players like that because we want to win some trophies mate, and if we've got young players who are really hungry to get better then that's what we need. And as an old player, who's been around for ten years, I kinda run off that enthusiasm that the young boys have!

"I'm not actually that old, but I do enjoy seeing young guys get an opportunity at Test level and Super Rugby level."

Having seen the fall from afar, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Slipper, 33, was over as a Test concern. Even before his very public transgression, the prop hadn't featured for the Wallabies since 2016. But he got a change of scenery, refreshed by a move to the Brumbies, to a younger squad with new dynamics. Then, in 2019, he was brought back into the green and gold fold for a biggie.

Slipper says that coming back for a match with the Springboks "hit me for six". But it started him on the path to becoming an important senior figure for his country, a steady influence rolling

trust and win over some supporters and loved ones again. He wanted to atone.

At that point, hitting the Test century was not even a fantasyland pipe dream. So when he was in national gold again for the build-up to the 2019 World Cup, he promised himself he'd cherish every match. And they just kept totting up.

That first game back, a 35-17 loss to the Boks, was cap number 87. Number 100 came against the All Blacks, in Brisbane.

The man known to some as 'Slip' has his views on what his game is all about today. And we'll get to that. But others could throw in from afar that the key to longevity for any front-rower is learning not just from the good times but especially from the rib-popping, harsh times. It is true that some prodigies are mashing fellow props right from the first "engage" but there are more than a few veterans around who have harnessed the power of previous hidings. Slipper recalls all too well his own rough debut.

"Our scrum was getting murdered by the English all night," Slipper says,

remembering the call for him to come off the bench for cap number one, in Perth. "Back then there was only one prop on the bench, so I covered both.

"They put me on in a five-metre scrum. It collapses, our tighthead gets sent off and after coming on at loosehead I've had to move over to tighthead and I'm hanging on for dear life. They ended up getting a penalty try.

"That was my baptism of fire against the English pack. There were some big players out there playing for England, so it was one of the proudest moments of my life but it was also one of the scariest moments of my life as well!

"I don't know if there was one particular game (where it all clicked) but in that first year, in 2010, I felt like I grew as the year went on. Because I only had three Super Rugby games to my name when I made that debut (just one start). So I had no chance at all – I was thrown in the deep end. But I ended that year with 14 Tests to my name. That year we knocked off the All Blacks in Hong Kong



Mr Popular Cheered on in the gym, at Japan 2019

THE NEXT GENERATION

Slipper tells us about four exciting young Wallabies coming through

NOAH LOLESIO Fly-half

"We're both Gold Coast boys and I've got to know him really well at the Brumbies. He's a really humble, respectful, young player. He has a lot of natural talent. What we've seen from him so far is good and he's a big part of our team at the moment."

HARRY WILSON No 8

"He's an absolute clown, that bloke! We're actually very close. I've got ten years on him but we're two peas in a pod. He's very physical and he's just one of those blokes who loves the game – he lives and breathes rugby."

ROB VALETINI Flanker

"He's phenomenal – my favourite player in Australian Super Rugby this year. He had that consistency. He is a man-mountain and he's going to have a big future for the Wallabies."

ANGUS BELL Loosehead

"He'll probably end up with my job soon! He's got a big body for a 21-year-old, naturally, and he's got a big engine on him so can play big minutes. He's a really good ball-carrier. He just needs time in the saddle. You can't learn to scrum in a book, you need minutes against the English, French and Kiwis."

"I've always prided myself on work-rate, defence and attack but probably the biggest work-on for me has been ball-carrying. I'm not a big bloke. I wouldn't class myself as a big, physical ball-runner. What I've seen

in this game is players are getting bigger, more powerful and quicker. So a player like me has had to adapt to keep up with the young fellas!"

"Training is probably the toughest bit at this point in my career. Training loads have gone through the roof with professional rugby. Ten years ago we didn't train anywhere near as long or as hard as what we do now. That's just rugby evolving."

"So for an older player like me, it's about trying to be ahead of the game,

smart-wise. It's using my brain more than my body because if I go head-to-head with big Tongan Thor, Taniela Tupou, I just won't win."

"It's about when to put yourself in the game, when not to. Mate, I think a lot of that comes with age and experience. When you're young you can go out there hammer for tong, and you can probably come out on top. But as you get older that's harder to do week in, week out. So I'll try to use my mind more than my body."

and that was a game that I really enjoyed. I scrummaged well and grew over the year."

Slipper is heading into yet another Rugby Championship. How does one survive in the rarefied atmosphere of Test rugby for so long?

Being adaptable is a good trait, he says, especially when it comes to adopting new game plans. But there is also having the toolkit that appeals to any coach anywhere. For a prop, that for sure means being able to scrummage and lift, to learn the plays and not need your hand held. He laughs that he doesn't know how he achieves it, but he's delighted that he's been able to.

But through any turmoil or the rise of the next great game plan, there is another constant; one that may well support a veteran of several regimes.

As Slipper tells us: "The personality and who I am does not change at all."

"You try to do your best for your team and any particular coach at the time. Different coaches have different philosophies on how the game is played

and that's fair. That's what makes rugby special, the different ways to play the game. But in terms of personalities – and I guess my footprint with the Wallabies – I feel like I haven't changed. I've been myself the whole time and I'd say it's really important to stay true to yourself."

Okay, but what skills have you added to your arsenal over your time at the top?

"That's a good question because from a young age I've always been one of those props who wanted to be involved in the rugby, not just the set-piece."

"Players are bigger, more powerful and quicker. I've had to adapt to keep up with the young fellas!"

Way back when, Slipper began an engineering degree, but as rugby became all-consuming he had to leave it behind. Today he is finally cresting on a business degree. He jokes about "punching something off" before he retires, but when he is asked about how he'll harness that when the boots are eventually cut off his feet, he explains that his brothers are certified builders and that a family racket in the property game would be a good next few steps. But he's open-minded about industries. There's that idea of adaptability again...

This all comes from a proud Gold Coast boy, who will happily while away the hours surfing or fishing. On the surface, it's all laid-back: the accidental centurion catching a wave. But he's put in serious work on himself to get here. **EW**



WORDS

TOM ENGLISH

MAIN PICTURE

BRENDAN MORAN/SPORTSFILE/GETTY IMAGES

Andrew Porter

He's not a new face in the Ireland team but he is in a new position.

Having switched from tighthead to loosehead, he tells his story

A

FTER HE left the field in Ireland's final Test of 2021, against Argentina at the Aviva, the television cameras lingered for a moment on Andrew

Porter with his deadpan expression just about visible beneath that Desperate Dan beard.

Any number of things could have been going through his mind at that moment. A quiet reflection on how brilliantly he has bounced back from being invalided out of the Lions tour even before they set off for South Africa? A sense of pride at how well he's transitioned from being Ireland's second-choice tighthead to their first-choice loosehead? A feeling of exhilaration having just won his sixth Test in a row, one of the six being a spectacular victory against the All Blacks?

Or maybe something a little more mundane, like, 'What will I feed Pablo when I get home?' 'Pablo's my dog, an old English bulldog,' says Porter. 'You know how they say that dogs and their owners begin to resemble each other after a while? I

think that's the case here. So I'm told anyway. I could have been thinking about anything, but Pablo was probably in there somewhere.'

In a rugby sense, 2021 was the most extraordinary year of his life, culminating with that victory over the All Blacks (his second over them in three attempts) and the part he played in it. A rookie loosehead at this level, he went hammer and tongs for 75 minutes, a rarity for a modern prop. He made eight tackles, carried ten times, jackaled his hairy head off its broad shoulders.

He embodied the ferocity of Ireland's performance, a display that saw New Zealand making 235 tackles, the most they've ever had to make in a Test. For a guy who had only just returned to the No 1 jersey having made his reputation in the No 3, it was a monumental effort. The fact that nobody in Ireland was surprised was testament to his excellence. Porter is a ball-carrying, hard-tackling, skilful beast no matter what number he has on his back. ►

P R O F I L E



I R E L A N D





► The move from tight to loose has not been without its challenges, he says, but he's warming to it. "I was a loosehead a long time ago, in school and university, but the position has evolved a lot since then. My exposure at tighthead definitely helps me. It gives me an understanding of what a tighthead is trying to do to me. It's the mental side of it that's been the battle. Learning new things and dealing with not getting things right. People ask how the two positions differ. Well, it feels like I can breathe again now. I don't feel like falling over exhausted after every scrum. There's less pressure coming through you at loosehead."

He goes into a technical explanation that confirms everything people say about him, that his gym work is otherworldly, that he's practically on speaking terms with every piece of apparatus known to man. "The best way I can explain it is like this – hitting a scrum at tighthead is like your safety bar squat while at loosehead it's more like a single-leg split squat or a Bulgarian split squat."

Er, ok... "I'm still trying to figure out the best way to explain it," he laughs. "It's definitely less taxing on the body. I'd say if you were to measure it then at a scrum about 60% pressure is going through your tighthead and 40% through your loosehead."

The idea to switch had been in the pipeline for a long time. Porter is way too good to be spending years as Tadhg Furlong's understudy at tighthead for club and country, so the switch was inevitable.

"The coaches said, 'Here's the roadmap, are you up for this?' I was. I'd won most of my caps as a sub for Tadhg but where I saw myself in the future, I wanted those extra minutes, so I ran towards the challenge and this is where I am, a loosehead."

The end of 2021 could hardly have gone any better for the 25-year-old and there can't have been a soul in Ireland who wasn't thrilled for him in the way everything has worked out, especially since the dejection of missing the Lions tour. What might have happened in South Africa had he got the chance, instead of busting his foot playing for Leinster in a meaningless Rainbow Cup game.

"I was only talking about it the other day with my girlfriend, Elaine. The emotion of making it, then the even bigger emotion of losing it. I found it very difficult to pick myself up again. After wallowing for a while, the Leinster coaches gave me a goal of starting the season at loosehead and I switched my mind to that. It's about dusting yourself

Scrum switch
Packing down at
loosehead for Leinster



Gym work
Doing weights with
Ireland in 2018

down and coming out swinging. It's hard to put into words the feelings but it has made me a stronger person and a better

player, I know that. And it reminded me how many people are in my corner, which was a real plus.

"My girlfriend, my family, my friends, team-mates, coaches, supporters, all sorts of people. Phone calls and texts and WhatsApps – it all helped. The

**"You can only bottle it
up for so long until you
explode with emotion"**

disappointment came in waves, but to have all those people rooting for me was a major thing for me. Hopefully there's another opportunity to go on a Lions tour down the line."

We can talk about his heartbreak of missing the trip to South Africa but these things are relative. Actual heartbreak was him losing his mum, Wendy, to cancer when he was just 12 years old. Proper pain was his struggle in trying to put his life back together in the wake of such a grievous tragedy.

He's happy to talk about it. "I grew up with the mentality of not opening up to people and managing the burden all by myself, but there is only so much you can take. We're all human. Talking about her helps. You can only bottle things up for so long until it suddenly hits you and you explode with emotion. I like talking about my mum.

"And if you open up to somebody it might help them open up to somebody else if they're in the same position. It's a real positive to be able to share these things. I learnt that along the way."



Power surge
Porter makes ground
against the All Blacks

school was the toughest but rugby was always there for me. My dad was always there. My sisters were always there."


He's got a tattoo dedicated to his mum. He sees it every day and so he feels her presence every day. In his quiet time now he likes to draw – or doodle, as he calls it. There's a nice story about that. During lockdown he wondered if there was anything he could do for a charity close to his heart, the Irish Cancer Society. They asked if he was artistic. He said he was, to a point. He showed them the doodles. An idea of face masks came up.

"I helped them design the Irish Cancer Society face mask and it went well. They sold in lots of places around the world and raised some money. The drawings on the mask are mine. I remember being out with Elaine doing some Christmas shopping (2020) and I saw a few people with them on. People with my drawings on their face.

"It was weird but brilliant. It was an honour and a privilege to help raise some funds for them because cancer impacts on so many of us and the cancer societies do incredible work. I'm an ambassador for the Irish Cancer Society."

Robbed of a Lions tour before bouncing back to beat the All Blacks in his new life as a loosehead, you wonder what further drama lies in wait this year. The Six Nations is right in front of his face – and it's exciting. He's probably the man least likely to get carried away by Ireland's excellent run in the autumn – victories with a style of play that's not just attritional but wildly entertaining – but he can't wait for the tournament to start all the same.

"The talent we have in this country is outstanding. We probably haven't seen this depth in a lot of years. And there's an opportunity for us now. It's not just one position where we have depth, it's all positions. We have lots of experience and we have lots of young guys pushing through. It's not about learning anymore, it's about winning. The other nations will all be saying the same thing. They'll be feeling good about themselves. The competition is savage. It's really exciting."

Porter will be a key man for Ireland, a prop with strength, pace and a powerful back story. A really good guy and a rugby player with all the materials to achieve greatness in the years ahead. 

His mum's funeral took place a day before he started secondary school. Imagine how tough that must have been. "A lot of people in school didn't know what I was going through and I developed an eating disorder. I'm sure it was linked to the loss of my mother. I was always the big kid when I was younger; I experienced some bullying and there was some deep-rooted stuff going on. It was all because I'd not wanted to talk about things, I wanted to deal with everything on my own and carry the burden by myself. I lost a lot of weight and sometime later I found pictures of myself and I tore them up because I didn't recognise the person I was looking at. It was me but it didn't look like me, it looked like somebody else.

"I'd gone from being one of the biggest lads to one of the skinniest. I found rugby training as an outlet. It was a great release. It was good for me physically and mentally. It was something else to focus on. Rugby was like therapy really. It was my way of expressing myself. That first year in

Dive time
Scoring a try
for his province



PICTURE IMAGES & INFO

Road Map

Words Gavin Mortimer // Main Picture Franck Fife/AFP/Getty Images

Talented French youngsters are progressing to the Test team thanks to their pathway system – but the same is not true in England. *Rugby World* reports

I**N THE** summer of 2018, France and England met in the final of the U20 World Championship. It was, as they say, a wonderful advertisement for the sport, with the French edging their old foes 33-25 for their first title of that age group.

Four years later those players are entering their prime years as professional athletes, their minds and their bodies fully matured. Romain Ntamack and Cameron Woki (right) were certainly impressive in this year's Six Nations, crucial members of the France team that won their first title in 12 years, while Demba Bamba and Jean-Baptiste Gros were also important components of the Grand Slam squad. Of the 23 young Frenchmen involved in the U20

triumph in 2018, nine have been capped and a tenth, No 8 Jordan Joseph, was part of the 2022 Six Nations squad.

In contrast, of the England U20 match-day squad only Marcus Smith has established himself in the Test side. Ted Hill, Ben Curry and Joe Heyes have been capped, but only the latter was in the Six Nations squad – and he didn't play.

The 46 players involved in the U20 final were clearly talented and there was little between the teams. So why the discrepancy in the development pathway? Take out Smith and the other England players (minus Ben White, now of Scotland) have five caps between them in four years. It's a sorry indictment of English







→ rugby, and evidence that something is not working within the RFU system.

It is instructive to trace the fortunes of those French players who haven't been capped. Everyone has made a good fist of their pro careers, playing regularly for Top 14 clubs or, in one or two cases, ProD2 sides, and a couple have represented France in sevens.

Several have been loaned to ProD2 clubs, gaining valuable experience in

scoring six tries in his first 12 games and earning that call-up to the France squad. He didn't get a cap but will soon, possibly in July when *les Bleus* play Japan.

Joseph and his generation have the good fortune to have come of age when the FFR and the LNR are no longer adversaries but allies. The bickering that characterised the previous decade has gone, as have many of the overseas players, which was one of the bones of

Exeter Chiefs and the former is joining Bristol Bears next season.

But that doesn't guarantee game time. Unlike the top French clubs, where players are regularly loaned to rivals, some Premiership clubs seem more reluctant to give their youngsters opportunities elsewhere. Two of the front row from the U20 final, hooker Henry Walker and loosehead Alex Seville, are both at Gloucester but up until mid-May they had started one league match this term between them. Worcester lock James Scott had played 160 minutes of rugby this season – all in the Premiership Rugby Cup – and Jordan Olowofela, who scored a brace of tries in the U20 final, had played eight times for the Dragons.

Leicester aren't shy in loaning out their young stars but it would be better if they had more faith in them. Olowofela made his senior debut for the Tigers in 2018 – the same season he was called into England's senior training squad – and in 2019-20 he scored three tries in nine starts. He was then loaned to Super Rugby's Western Force and continued to score tries, bagging five in ten matches.

This is a man with an eye for the line but on returning to Welford Road, Olowofela was farmed out to the

Top French clubs regularly loan players to rivals. Premiership clubs seem more reluctant

a league that is competitive and challenging. Adrien Séguet, who came off the bench to score France's third try in the U20 final, was twice loaned by Lyon to ProD2 clubs – Mont-de-Marsan and Grenoble – but next season he will play for Top 14 outfit Castres. It reflects well on him that he was prepared to drop down a level to develop his game, and his work ethic has been rewarded.

Joseph was named 2018 Player of the Tournament, a remarkable achievement given that he was only 17. A product of Massy RC, to the south of Paris and renowned for developing talent, the No 8 joined Racing 92 for the 2018-19 season and made 11 appearances, including his European Champions Cup debut.

Then his progression stalled. Covid didn't help and the months away from the game turned his mind and body rusty. So last October Racing agreed to loan Joseph to Pau. He's been sensational,

contention. This season each Top 14 club must field a match-day squad containing 16 French-qualified players (rising to 17 next season) and points are deducted for non-compliance.

The Gallagher Premiership is playing catch-up to France in this regard. While there are financial incentives for clubs to have England Qualified Players (EQP) in their squads, particularly if they average 15 out of the match-day 23 across a season, there is no mandatory requirement. When London Irish played Harlequins in April, Quins had 18 EQPs in their squad but Irish had only nine.

As this season neared its close, only six of the England U20 XV from 2018 had played more than ten league games for their clubs (see panel); two, Gabriel Ibitoye and Tom Hardwick, haven't played any serious rugby this season after moves to France turned sour, although the latter has been on trial at

Class of 2022
France's Six Nations
Grand Slam winners



Contrasting Fortunes

How many games starters from the 2018 final are playing



ENGLAND U20 XV

PREM 21-22

ENG CAPS

15. Tom Parton (London Irish)	15	0
14. Gabriel Ibitoye (Tel Aviv Heat)	-	0
13. Fraser Dingwall (Northampton)	20	0
12. Tom Hardwick (Albi/Exeter)	0	0
11. Jordan Olowofela (Dragons)	-	0
10. Marcus Smith (above, Quins)	9	10
9. Ben White (London Irish)	16	0
1. Alex Seville (Gloucester)	1	0
2. Henry Walker (Gloucester)	2	0
3. Ehren Painter (Northampton)	13	0
4. Joel Kpoku (Lyon)	-	0
5. James Scott (Worcester)	0	0
6. Ted Hill (Worcester)	19	2
7. Ben Curry (Sale)	15	1
8. Josh Basham (Newcastle)	9	0

Total

119

13

FRANCE U20 XV

TOP 14 21-22

FRA CAPS

15. Clément Laporte (Lyon)	18	0
14. Lucas Tauzin (Toulouse)	19	0
13. Pierre-Louis Barassi (Lyon)	12	3
12. Romain Ntamack (Toulouse)	14	28
11. Maxime Marty (Carcassonne)	-	0
10. Louis Carbonel (Toulon)	22	4
9. Arthur Coville (Stade Français)	24	0
1. Jean-Baptiste Gros (Toulon)	15	19
2. Guillaume Marchand (Lyon)	17	0
3. Demba Bamba (Lyon)	13	22
4. Thomas Lavault (La Rochelle)	22	0
5. Killian Geraci (Lyon)	10	4
6. Antonin Berruyer (Grenoble)	-	0
7. Cameron Woki (Bordeaux)	14	19
8. Jordan Joseph (above, Pau)	16	0

Total

216

99

Dragons. "The opportunity for Jordan to get valuable game time in a top-flight competition like the United Rugby Championship will be beneficial for the next step of his development," said Tigers head coach Steve Borthwick.

Surely at 24 the best way for an English player to develop is by playing in the Premiership. When discussing Olowofela's move, Dragons coach Dean Ryan said: "Leicester sign players like Nemani Nadolo and it becomes tougher to get 15 games a year."

There is also an irony that Joel Kpoku, who left Saracens for Lyon last year, was

Player of the Match as the French side beat Wasps in the Challenge Cup semis.

The first of that England U20 XV to be capped at senior level was Worcester flanker Ted Hill, when he came off the bench against Japan in November 2018. He waited more than two-and-a-half years for his next cap, against the USA last July. Perhaps it would have come sooner if he hadn't stayed at Worcester.

"There's always been a thing around Premiership clubs," reflected Hill in 2020. "There was a stigma that if you weren't in a top Premiership club you weren't going to play for England."

There is more than a scintilla of truth in what Hill said. English rugby has always been conservative; one might say it's become even more so under their Australian coach. Eddie Jones only selected Marcus Smith when the clamour from the press and public became deafening. Smith and several of his generation should have been blooded in the Autumn Nations

Cup of 2020, when the powers-that-be organised a tournament at short notice after the first lockdown. England played France in the final and among a callow French side were four players from the U20 final. Jones, on the other hand, stayed loyal to the bulk of the side that had lost the World Cup final a year earlier.

Fabien Galthié has been an inspired choice as coach and has made inspired choices in his team selections. This time last year hardly anyone outside Perpignan had heard of Melvyn Jaminet, who had played no junior representative rugby. Someone obviously tipped off Galthié about Jaminet's raw talent and, having cast an eye over him, he was bold enough to select him for last summer's tour of Australia. Can any English fan imagine Jones capping a 21-year-old from Doncaster Knights?

For England it's the tried and trusted before the tyro. Look at the desperation with which Jones keeps returning to Manu Tuilagi. As Sam Warburton put it this year: "We've got 30 inside-centres that are professionally contracted (in England) and we can't find someone to replace Manu. It blows my mind."

Think what it does to the minds of young English centres, Sam! Blows their minds and shatters their morale. England must follow the example of France and start putting their faith in youth. That's where the future lies, not in a 31-year-old with two dodgy hamstrings. **RM**



Scotland



T

HE LAST time we saw Huw Jones in a Scotland shirt was in Covid times, when stadiums were empty and atmospheres were non-existent. It was in

Paris in 2021, a famous away victory marked by a lot of shouting on the pitch and the sound of one man clapping in the vast acreage of the Stade de France.

Jones came on as a substitute that night. Since then, not a look-in. There's been nine Scotland Test matches, eight different Scotland centres and eight Scottish centre combinations. There's been Chris Harris and Sam Johnson, Mark Bennett and Sione Tuipolutu. Matt Scott played against South Africa. Cam

Redpath played against Wales. Adam Hastings filled in at 12 for a spell against Australia and Finn Russell did the same against Ireland. Jones has been a forgotten man throughout all of this. Exiled at Harlequins (but soon to be rejoining Glasgow), he has been so far out of the loop that he must have wondered if he'd ever get back in there.

Well, he's back. Or he was. A brilliant run of games at full-back for Quins demanded his inclusion in Gregor Townsend's tour squad, only for a back injury to rule him out on the eve of departure. The rise and fall and rise was almost complete. What an experience it has been, from his devastating

Words Tom English // Main Picture Stu Forster/Getty Images



COND COMING

Having struggled for game time and self-belief at Glasgow, a move to Harlequins revived Scot **HUW JONES's** career

Scotland

→ introduction to Test rugby in 2016 (scorching tries against Australia and then against England, New Zealand and Australia in 2017, and against England and France in 2018) to not getting a game for Dave Rennie's Glasgow and being too shy and too scared to talk to his coach about why he wasn't playing.

And now this. Before the ill-timed injury, he felt he was playing the best rugby of his life, which is quite something given the moments he's already delivered.

Quins were central to the turnaround. "I was really happy down there," he says. "They're the best group of people I have been involved with in rugby, from the top down. Everybody brought so much energy. Leaders like Danny (Care), Dommers (Alex Dombrandt) and Joe Marler set the standard for everyone.

"All players say it but that was the best dressing room I was ever in. I'd never met Joe before, but I heard that he was a bit mental and I didn't know how to act around him at all in the beginning. I was really quiet, just said 'hi'. But he's a really nice guy, he can be weird sometimes,

"This is the best I have been as a player, I'm better now than at the start of my Scotland career"

but that's just who he is. He's a great leader, has very smart things to say and says the right things at the right time. He has his finger on the pulse, Joe.

"When I joined last summer I felt that I got more respect from the players than I thought I would. They were like, 'Great, we have another international player coming to the club', whereas in Scotland everyone is an international player, everyone has had a cap at some point. It's been nice to be able to prove myself again. It's the most games in a row I've ever played in a season in my life and it's rebuilt my confidence. You can see by the way we play that we were having fun out there. Everything was so positive. An amazing club. I loved it."

Why move back to Glasgow, then? "It was a tough one, largely to do with salary cap. I only signed a one-year deal and around January they decided that they weren't going to keep me, which was fair enough because I hadn't played a lot at that point. I was on the bench most of the time and Glasgow were keen to bring me back. Since January, things have really taken off for me so I'm quite disappointed about leaving given where I am now, but that's just how contracts go.



Loving life
Celebrating at Quins

"The salary cap in England is biting and clubs can't keep everyone. Also, Quins have such a good academy that it would be a shame to waste those players.

There's some really good ones coming through who will do great things."

He needed the move south – even if it was short-lived. Needed reinvention after some bruising years at Glasgow that cost him a place at the World Cup in Japan and ate into his self-belief in a way that's quite amazing when he lays it all out.

"When I first arrived in Scotland I was so confident. I had come off the back of playing a load of games in South Africa, I'd won the Currie Cup, I was flying high and was able to play well straightaway. But then injuries came, plus a lack of

game time, and you take a hit with that. I did have a slump and missing the World Cup added to that. Around that time and beyond I had absolutely no confidence.

"Dave was coaching Glasgow and I found that whole situation intimidating. I wanted to talk to him and ask what I needed to do to improve but I didn't know what to say. Going to see your coach is a normal thing for most players when they're not playing, but I struggled with those conversations and when I did get the words out I wasn't getting a clear answer back. I didn't feel like I was getting the help I needed in terms of development. I found it really difficult."

He sings the praises of the coaching staff at Quins, their openness, their

honesty, their determination to make the environment fun as well as serious. He wants the same upon his return to Glasgow. The coach who re-signed him, Danny Wilson, has gone, so building a relationship with the new man (Franco Smith) is a hurdle he'll have to climb. But he's coming back as a different animal.

"The coaches at Quins were really approachable and easy to talk to. I have more confidence in myself now but at that time back in Glasgow I was really scared of that situation and a lot of the time I just put it off and didn't speak to the coaches and they wouldn't go out of their way to find me, so there was this awkward spiral of no communication.

"Game time is the most important thing for a player. Coaches can tell you you're an amazing player, but if you're not playing it's hard to improve and be happy. Your job is to play rugby and you're not doing your job. I was young as well. Everything had gone well for me up to that point, then everything went downhill and I didn't know what to do."

Observers searched for reasons for his demise. This was a guy who lit it up in Scotland's most thrilling back-line in an age, a guy who slalomed and scythed his way through teams to score spectacular tries. In those early years he was world class from top to toe. What went wrong?

"People start to form their own opinions. Some would say that I was only up for the big games, which wasn't true, I wanted to play every game. I had this false reputation of only wanting to play for Scotland and the big European matches and not caring about the other ones, but I just wasn't picked for them.

"I was desperate to play. People were saying, 'Maybe he's not as good as we thought, maybe he got lucky scoring those tries for Scotland' and the longer



Returning Warrior
Jones has rejoined Glasgow

PICS/Getty Images & Inpho

that goes on the more you start to believe it. Maybe I was lucky with those tries, maybe I'm not as good as I think I am. You do get negative. That happened to me. I really started to doubt my ability."

His last season with Glasgow did see an improvement. He started playing full-back and the player of old could be seen in flashes. He won a Scotland recall, was in the 23 for all of the Six Nations matches in 2021, scored against Ireland and Italy, then disappeared again.

Last summer he was supposed to join Bayonne, but they got relegated and he had a clause in his deal to abort the move in the event of the drop. Quins came in and he jumped at the chance.

The spring was when it all started to turn. Joe Marchant and Luke Northmore went away with England for the Six

Nations and he got an opportunity in the midfield. The move to full-back happened when Tyrone Green got injured. That's when things sky-rocketed. He played 29 games, including the Premiership semi-final. In his entire four-year spell with Glasgow he played only 49.

"When you're playing all the time you can start to do more out on the field because you have the confidence to do it. You try things that you might not try if you were only playing in bits and pieces. I think this is the best I have been as a player, that I'm a better player now than I was at the beginning of my Scotland career when I was scoring those tries.

"A few boys asked me if I saw myself as a 15 rather than a 13 and I couldn't decide. One of the lads said, 'You're just a rugby player, you can play anywhere' and I thought that was a nice thing to say. I'm comfortable playing across the back-line. I don't want to say to any coach that this is my position in case they see me somewhere else, but at the same time you never want to be seen as a

jack-of-all-trades and be cast as a utility back. I love playing 15, I love playing 13. It's not for me to decide. I'm happy anywhere, I just want to play."

Townsend will have to wait a little longer to have him back. His midfield has been defensively solid but creatively stodgy. Jones can make the sparks fly again. **EW**



Magic moment Scoring one of his two tries in Scotland's 2018 win against England at Murrayfield

FACT FILE

DoB 17 Dec 1993

Born Edinburgh

Position Centre

or full-back

Club Glasgow

Height 6ft 1in

Weight 16st

Scotland debut

v Japan, 2016

Instagram @hrfjones

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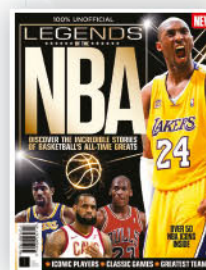
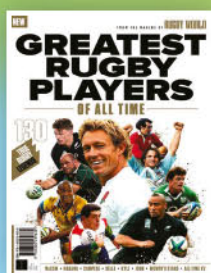
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